

ORIENTAL CINEMA

#18 - SUMMER 2000

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SONNY CHIBA
The Most Devastating Karate Machine Alive!
"CHAMPION OF DEATH" United Artists



THE MAN BEYOND BIONICS
INFRA-MAN
THE ULTIMATE IN SCIENCE FICTION HOW

EDITORIAL

Wow, guess what?! It's finally been acknowledged, by a zine other than O.C., that I exist! I was amazed when some reader notified me, as he snickered and chuckled, that I was actually mentioned in an issue of J.D. Lee's publication, G-Fan! Not only that, but I was told it was part of a caption, for a photo of "us" at G-Fest (see full review elsewhere in this issue) 1999. The photo also had J.D. Lee in the shot; which I found strange since I don't recall ever having posed with him. Regardless, my informer continued to smirk as he told me the good news. I replied, "What's so funny?!" Then he showed me the photo, and it turns out it wasn't me in the picture, it was some fellow who bears only a slight resemblance to me! I'm not mad about the mix-up, I find it quite amusing, in fact. I don't know who botched up the lay-out of that magazine, but they really gotta' stop sniffing the super-glue. I suspect the poor guy who involuntarily "posed as" Damon Foster, must be really upset now. To be labeled as a "Damon Foster wannabe" or a "Damon Foster Imitator", that's gotta' hurt! They might as well start calling that fellow "Damon U!"

We all make mistakes, so I forgive the blunderer at G-Fan who misused my name in the caption. After all, we all make mistakes. Even I make mistakes. I hope I don't botch up the caption on this page which accompanies my obligatory editorial photo of August Ragone and myself! Wouldn't that be embarrassing?! I would never live that down.

Sincerely Mine, Damon Foster

<<http://www.draculina.com/dfoster.htm>>

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August Ragone (left) in San Francisco's Japantown, with J.D. Lee (right), that loose-knit party animal himself! Standing in-between them is Bob Johnson wearing his costume of the Japantown tower!

ORIENTAL CINEMA

#18

ゴジラ
2000

GOZILLA 2000

SUPERHEROES

HOT CHICKS

CAMERA 3

ANIME &

MORE!



usa \$5.95
canada \$6.95

All Godzilla photos © Toho

LETTERS

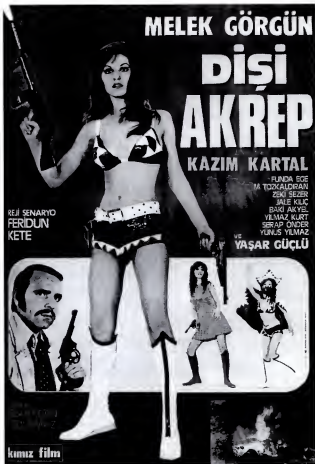
Dear Damon,

I can't believe I'm writing again so soon. In regards to Wang Yu in the CINEMA OF VENGEANCE review: THE CHINESE BOXER (AKA THE HAMMER OF GOD) and KING OF BOXERS (AKA THE SCREAMING TIGER AND TEN FINGERS OF STEEL) are two different films. While doing™ research, I stumbled across a review for POLICE WOMEN AGAINST JACKIE CHAN (which is the release title for POLICE WOMAN), and there was no mention of Wang Yu whatsoever. Charlie Chin (later to appear in the "Lucky Stars" films) is the star, it turns out. Is Wang Yu also in the movie? I hauled out CINEMA OF VENGEANCE and I hit the "still" button to get a good look at the face of Jackie's opponent (hey, I'm an obsessive, compulsive person!), and it's definitely the face of Charlie Chin, so the review was right. /Thanks for confirming that! Let me explain my error: I saw the interview in CINEMA OF VENGEANCE, where Wang Yu mentioned having bottled Jackie Chan in an older film. Though he must have been talking about KILLER METEORS or FANTASY POLICE MISION, they immediately cut to a clip of POLICE WOMAN a.k.a. POLICE WOMAN AGAINST JACKIE CHAN, I guess it's the only footage they could get clearance on. This was misleading on their part, so I never looked closely, and I assumed that it was Wang Yu, not Charlie Chin, in the car fight. -DF/ So it's not Wang Yu, but Charles Chin Shang Lim who plays the hero in POLICE WOMAN. / And I must say, he's the ugliest "Police Woman" I've ever seen— where is Angie Dickinson when we need her! -DF/ Lana Zukowski
Phoenixville, PA

Damon,

There's a few pressing issues I felt warranted some discussion. Not between us, mind you. Just discussion. Maybe a simple stream of thoughts in your own mind. These issues are as follows:

1) Your magazine serves no purpose other than becoming a quality material to scoop shit out of kitty litter with. /You obviously don't consider English material an obscure foreign film and TV shows to be a "useful purpose"! DC was the first American zine to cover the Korean UREME films, Japan's MAJIN HUNTER MITSURUGI, the various versions of SAIYUKI, and probably a



dozen other things which I virtually introduced to the American masses. Obviously, you and I define "useful purposes" differently. -DF/ Even then this is impractical and much too expensive.

2) Whether it's difficulty with words such as "helicopter" (as you put it) or the general molesting of the English language which you so enjoy, your lack of education

is far too evident. /On the contrary, I've had Latin school. Hell, I've been in traffic school at least four times! -DF/

3) You may be a nazi. I don't have any solid sources regarding this, however. You should check it out yourself. /I checked. I discovered that most of my favorite celebrities are anything but white, and anybody with brains would notice that. "Nazi" no, "naughty"

Dear Mr. Foster,

I enjoyed your magazine **ORIENTAL CINEMA: THE FEMME FATALES ISSUE**. I would like to know who the girl is on page one, the picture which looks like a stamp, with "Letters" below. I don't know her name. She's a model, the photo was taken from some advertisement (perhaps for breast implants) in a HK gossip rag. She's attractive as any other model, but I think any chick who dresses like that and shows that much cleavage is going to look incredibly hot. If the photo were of her in the nude, your imagination wouldn't be piqued, and the shot would be far less arousing. So I wouldn't sweat it -OF- and who are the girls on the right, who are at the beach with their bikinis on? /Amy Yip and Veronica Yip, no relation. In fact they both don't actually appear to have been there at the same time. It was a cut & paste deal -OF- I think I must order also the other issues of **ORIENTAL CINEMA**, which I will do certainly, after you woke up my interest for Ultraman and other Asian heroes.

I like also the three issues of your magazine **HEROES ON FILM** very much. How about publishing a fourth one and over-looking more the serial-superheroes (like *Spy Smasher*, *Captain Marvel*, *Captain America*, *Black Commando*, etc.), the Mexican wrestlers like *BATWOMAN* (Mexico; 1967), for example? And the Italian superheroes: *THREE SUPERMEN*, *AVENGER X*, *GOLDFACE*, *ARGOMAN*, and *SUPER ARGOMAN*, for examples? You nearly discussed only *Ultraman*, *Kamen Rider*, and *Power Rangers*, and less the others!

I'm searching also since a long time for the film, *GOLDFACE, THE FANTASTIC SUPERMAN* on video, since I saw it for the first time on TV back in 1983 together with *THE THREE FANTASTIC SUPERMEN*, *ARGOMAN* and *SUPER ARGOMAN*. I have nearly every Italian superhero film of the 1960s except this one, because I can't find it. Even Video Search of Miami hasn't got it. Where can I find *GOLDFACE*? Perhaps you can help me?

I'm also from Turkey, so I also included some information, ads & photos about Turkish superhero films. I hope it's useful.
Erol Imre
Munchen, Germany

Dear Erol,

I would have loved to have continued publishing **HEROES ON FILM**! The whole reason I founded the ill-fated magazine was to make people know about obscure superhero films. But because **HEROES ON FILM** didn't follow a predictable format and cater to comicbook geeks and anime dweebs,

it's life-span was best measured in seconds. Thank you so much for the photos from the Turkish superhero movies, I'm cramming as many of these shots as can fit, in this here Letters section.

The superhero movies of Italy, Turkey and Mexico are quite similar to the superheroes from Asia, so I'll use any excuse I can, to include such movies in the pages of OC. So far, I've managed to put Italy's *THREE FANTASTIC SUPERMEN* film series in OC because they involve martial arts. Trying to get Mexican wrestlers in OC is a little more difficult though, unless we place them under the banner of "Mexican martial arts movies"! It's hard to know where

to draw the line, but I will most certainly try to have OC cover any genre which involves action and funny costumes; it's all good. *GOLDFACE: THE FANTASTIC SUPERMAN* is a really fun movie, I loved it! I hope to review it in OC, if ever I can find photos to illustrate the review. I also hope to eventually find Turkey's own *BATMAN* ripoff *ALTIN COCUK* ("Golden Boy") 1960s film series, the Turkish girls & guns spy-caper *ÖRSİ AKREP* (starring Melek Gorgun), comedian Sadri Alışık's *DUMB DETECTIVE AGAINST KILINK* (A.K.A. "Turist Ömer Uzayyalı" and "Saskin Hafife Kılınk-e Karsı"). But so many films, so little time -OF



much different than the second wave, or rather, the "Heisei" Godzilla movies which lasted from GODZILLA 1985 to GODZILLA VS. DESTROYER, other than its being a little darker and slightly more grim.

With a production schedule of 10 weeks, all raw footage was completed around the end of August 1999, about a year before its American release. At one of the many Godzilla websites, producer Shogo Tomiyama (the head of the Heisei Godzilla series) was quoted as saying: "When we decided to remake the Godzilla film, I wanted to bring back the mysteries and invincibility that Godzilla initially had, in the earlier years. The design characteristics are shown well in its face, dorsal fins and the skin surface." These words came as music to the ears of at least two types of kaiju fans: 1. Those who felt betrayed by the Tri-Star bastardization. 2. Those who felt betrayed by the Tri-Star bastardization and lose sleep over it, and debate endlessly on newsgroups, making

enemies of each other and engaging in arguments with the intellectual equivalent of "Is so!" "Is not!" "Is so!" "Is not!" Regardless of the unstable fans, it's agreed by all that GODZILLA 2000 is a step back in the right direction, featuring a talented crew. It was directed by Takao Okawara, who knows his stuff; he also directed GODZILLA VS. MOTHRA (Toho; 1992), GODZILLA VS. DESTROYER (Toho; 1995), and THE ABDUCTION (1997).

Personally, I was most impressed by the design of the new Godzilla costume. It's not as good as the ones in the 1960s classics like DESTROY ALL MONSTERS, but it looks like a complete anti-Tri-Star design, with the traditional Japanese look, but making the dorsal spines and teeth even longer. It's as though they deliberately set out to make him into the antithesis of the Tri-Star character. As I understand it, Mr. Suzuki said that he wanted the back plates to be even larger than the final approval, preferring if they were between 40-60 cm high. My only problem with the design is the wideness of the mouth. More than once in GODZILLA 2000, his gaping, big mouth allows us to look right into his big rubber head, making it look hollow, open & empty.

Mr. Tomiyama also went on to state, "Most of the Godzilla parts will be acted out by an actor in the Godzilla suit, but we'll also have special close-up parts and full Computer-Generated parts, depending on the situation." Take that as you may, but I personally wish they would avoid the computer stuff altogether, to be as non-Tri-Star as possible. As the story goes, their intent was to improve the digital technology used in the new Mothra trilogy, and create an entirely new expression. "I want people to leave the theater totally mystified and overwhelmed by Godzilla's invincibility. I integrated the special effects team to the mainframe team to have one united front, and asked both directors, Suzuki and Okawara, to discuss everything thoroughly." Computer generated FX are inevitable in any current, mainstream science fiction caper. For years however, the Godzilla movies managed to be relatively free of this crap. The first time I ever really noticed them in a Japanese Godzilla movie was in GODZILLA VS. DESTROYER. Their significance increased with the



(村田雄浩)

TAKEHIRO MURATA

Date of Birth: March 18th, 1960,
Place of Birth: Tokyo.

Murata was once known for more "serious" acting than that of "childish monster movies," because he used to have his own theater company called "Actors' Thrills & Chances." He's well known [in Japan] for his roles in many TV dramas and commercials, as well as appearances in several Juzo Itami films. In GODZILLA 2000, he plays Yuuji Shinoda, president of GPN (Godzilla Prediction Net), a character who's one of the first to observe Godzilla's invasion in Hokkaido's Nemura Peninsula. The fictional character has a determination, almost a passion for Godzilla rather like the obsessive, vengeful soldier in GODZILLA 1985. His daughter Iyo (Maya Suzuki) helps the character to seek Godzilla data, but Iyo can't relate to his workaholic passion for the Big G.

Takehiro Murata filmography:
OMOEBE TOKUNI KITAMONDA (1979)
GODZILLA VS. MOTHRA (1992)
MINBO NO ONNA (1992)
DAIBYONIN (1993)
GODZILLA VS. DESTROYER (1995)
MARU-TAI NO ONNA (1997)
GODZILLA 2000 (1999)



HIROSHI ABE

Date of Birth: June
22nd, 1964.
Place of Birth:
Kanagawa.

Abe was a model before becoming an actor. His first appearance on screen was in HAI KARA-SAN GA TORU ('87). His acting ability is diverse, ranging from roles in the NHK network's historical "Taiga Dramas" (like GENROKU) to comical roles as in some "infoweb" commercial film by Fujitsu. Also has been appearing on stage since 1994, in Kohji Tsuka's production of ATAMI MURDERS: MONTE CARLO ILLUSION. In GODZILLA 2000, he plays Katagiri Mitsuo, a trigger-happy leader in the CCI (Crisis Control Information), who makes orders to attack Godzilla while other members (like Shinoda) advise it's better to study, possibly negotiate with Godzilla.

filmography:

HAI KARA-SAN GA TORU (1987)
YAMATO TAKERU (1994)
KYODAN RUGAR P088 (1994)
HITODENASHI NO KOI (1995)
TAKO NO KATAMI (1996)
THIRTY ('997)
FRENCH DRESSING (1996)
GODZILLA 2000 ('999)

three MOTHRA films. The computer FX do little for me; what we want to see when viewing a Godzilla movie is the good old-fashioned, back-to-basics, rubber suits! For this movie, they constructed four Godzilla costumes: one for water scenes, and three land suits for the main bulk of production (on the miniature sets of places like Shinjuku and Nemuro). The special effects team was lead by Kenji Suzuki of REBIRTH OF MOTHRA 3 (Toho; 1998).

It's a relief that the Japanese generally stuck to the traditional, tried-and-true format of rubber costumes, instead of the headache-inducing computer effects seen in Tri-Star's fiasco. Even so, GODZILLA 2000 does feature some obligatory computer-generated crap. For example, the "Full Metal Missiles." The missiles in the old films were actual objects that I felt I could touch. These computer-generated rockets, however have no mass to them and don't appear solid to me. Though it's obvious some C.A.D. drawers and computer-animators really know their U.C.S. icons and the X,Y and Z planes, these artificial things still look like high-tech cartoons. In the old days, when Godzilla is hit by exploding projectiles, you can tell that they're something real, in the three-dimensional world that the actor (in the costume) had to interact with, unlike these substance-free animated images which have no "heart" or depth. Even so, the military's missile at-



tack is decent, saved by neat scenes of small pieces of Godzilla's flesh flying with each explosive hit! Sadly, Orga's flying saucer is some of the worst CGI effects I've seen in a feature-length movie, and reminds me of the equally bad "flying" scenes in Australia's ULTRAMAN: TOWARD THE FUTURE. Why they left this poorly done spaceship/meteor (whatever) in the finished print of GODZILLA 2000 is beyond me, and these scenes really make the movie appear to have been rushed. If these shots remain in the U.S. print (and I fear they will), the critics and Godzilla scoffers will have a field day. I've been trying to avoid using the abbreviation CGI (Computer-Generated Image), because it looks too much like CCI, a fictional army in the film, and CCI stands for something

like "Crisis Control Intelligence," "Crisis Control Intelligence Agency" or "Crisis Control Investigation," depending on who you ask.

According to a Japanese talk-show, Tomiyama agrees that the human subplots shouldn't propel the main story of any Godzilla films. After the Heisei Godzilla movies (of which I've given little attention), I'm relieved to hear the producer feels there's too much screentime between the human characters. For GODZILLA 2000, however, the intention was that the human scenes should take a back-burner while the monsters get center-stage. Whether or not this goal was successful, is up to the viewer. I felt that the humans in GODZILLA 2000 still take up too much screentime, and they're



NAOMI NISHIDA

Date of Birth: February 16th, 1972

Place of Birth: Hiroshima.

Naomi Nishida started out as a model in commercials & magazines, and yet it was a unisex, almost androgynous approach which lead her to appear in many wholesome TV dramas such as HOW TO BE A WITCH, something called OVER TIME, and I LOVE YOU DAD: MORE THAN ANYONE IN THE WORLD. Naomi Nishida was awarded a Japan Academy Award for Newcomers of the Year, in her first film MY SECRET CACHE (97), and also a

'Leading Actress' Award in the Hawaii International Film Festival. Her role in GODZILLA 2000 is that of science journalist Yuku.

HAUNTED SCHOOL (1996)
MY SECRET CACHE (1997)
HAUNTED SCHOOL 3 (1997)
BEGGING FOR LOVE (1998)
NABI'S LOVE (1999)
GODZILLA 2000 (1999)



as uninteresting & pointless as the people in the Heisei series. To me, none of these people are distinguishable, and none can compare with the actors (Akira Kubo, Kenji Sahara, etc.) of the golden years. With all due respect to Toho president Shogo Tomiyama (he took over when the late Tomoyuki Tanaka started getting senile), I feel they blundered on this; and missed the mark. There should have been even less "human time," and even more "monster time" in GODZILLA 2000. The people in GODZILLA 2000 are not compelling to me in the slightest, and their plight is uneventful. In the good old days, there was actual tension as the detective (Yosuke Natsuke) protected Princess Selina (Akiko Wakabayashi) from assassins in GHIDRAH, THE THREE HEADED MONSTER, and we cheered Akira Kubo and his fellow astronauts in their shoot-out (with blood!) with Kilaak slaves on Ogasawara Island in DESTROY ALL MONSTERS, and we were amused by Nick Adams in MONSTER ZERO! Even Ichiro, the otherwise bothersome twerp who hogged most of the screentime in GODZILLA'S REVENGE, had enough depth and emotions to finally kick some ass at the finale—and we condoned it! The characters in the old movies held my attention, but the human mannequins in GODZILLA 2000 do nothing for me, and will fade from my memory by the time you read this.

By the time you read this, Godzilla 2000

may very well have been released to America. At the time of this writing, the plan is that the movie is being given the biggest North American opening in the history of the Godzilla movies (the Japanese ones, anyway). I hear GODZILLA 2000 will open August 11, 2000 (putting it in competition with other summer movies like RAGING SILENCE and THE X-MEN), at about 2000 theaters across the country. Supposedly, Tri-Star still has their greedy paws in there somewhere. Hopefully, with them involved in the release, they won't splice in footage of Mathew Broderick or whatever. I can just imagine Broderick playing reporter Steve Martin Jr. I personally was irritated that Tri-Star has any involvement, but time will tell whether they do a decent job of releasing it. As for its release in Japan, there was a random pole or two to determine the film's Japanese Box office Results.

According to Aaron J. Smith's Unofficial Fan Site <www.fandom.com/godzilla>, GODZILLA 2000 held its own and was still still clinging to top ten for the week ending Jan. 24th, 2000.

GODZILLA 2000 was in the number 10 spot, playing on 13 screens and making \$250,064 for the week. It was beat out, however, by BLAIR WITCH PROJECT, JOAN OF ARK, some Disney "Tarzan" cartoon, and END OF DAYS—whatever that is.

Before going into the script, I have one other bone to pick with this semi-disappointing film: The music. I've hated



SHIRO SANO

Date of Birth:
March 4th, 1955
Place of Birth:
Shimane.

His major break into the world of acting was the role of Fuyuhiko in the TV series ZUTTO ANATA GA SUKI DATTA, but he continues to appear in other dramas on TV. He's also a musician, writes novels, and directs films. His first directorial was 1999's KARAOKE. In GODZILLA 2000, he plays Miyasaka Shiro, scientist of the CCI (Crisis Control Information) who has a knack for locating rocks which are in fact hibernating meteors, UFOs and the monster Orga. With GODZILLA 2000, Shiro Sano achieved his lifelong dream of appearing in the series, of which he's been a fan—in fact, it was his love of the Godzilla movies which encouraged him to pursue an acting career in the first place.

YUME MIRU YONI NEMURITAI (1986)
GENSEN-KAN SHUKIN (1993)
MAINICHI GA NATSU YASUMI (1994)
SHARAKU (1995)
GODZILLA 2000 (1999)

most theme music ever since STAR WARS came along and said all film scores have to be generic flat, symphonic hum-drum. As a child, I could tap my feet and mouth the catchy, military march of DESTROY ALL MONSTERS, and the Ennio Moricone-ish ending ballad for GODZILLA VS. GIGAN. Even the comical tunes in GODZILLA VS. MEGALON had more "distinctive personality" than the dull, unmemorable music in GODZILLA 2000. To its credit, GODZILLA 2000 does feature one Akira Ifukube oldie when Godzilla gets up again to kick ass, but since the remainder is the more current, uninteresting, generic music, the brief usage of the old Ifukube song strikes me as more of a parody of the old days, than a salute.

The Script.....

If you've the stamina to pay close enough attention to these dimly lit shenanigans, there are three or four main portions to the story:

Numero Uno: Something to do with





photographer and/or Godzillagrapper Yuki Ichinose. Like most people her age, she's 25. This 'yucky itchi nose' (whatever) chick is a science journalist, one of three people (which includes Yuuji Shinoda, a fictional character who claims to be the leading expert of Godzilla research; but the character's name should be Yuji Ragone) who form the GPN (Godzilla Prediction Net), who are setting up censors to anticipate Godzilla's next attack, just in case he should return after all these years, to hassle the Northern coast of Cape Nosappu, in Hokkaido. This may seem like a far-fetched prediction on the part of the three main protagonists (with 'distinctive personalities' according to some website, though not according to the film), but since this is a Godzilla movie, their anticipations were correct. So at midnight, Godzilla emerges from a foggy sea, to the accompanying shattering of a car's windshields (caused by the vibration of Godzilla's roar). His brief confrontation with the car is too derivative of American movies like JURASSIC PARK and Tri-Star's travesty. The old Godzilla rarely (if ever) inter-acted with specific people. Anyway: This time, he aims his tap-dancing at the country's main energy plants (so yet again we have some dead-serious preaching about atomic fuel), including nuclear reactors. The setting for these shots is Tokaimura, where in real life, there was a nuclear accident on September 30, 1998 (an employee made a mistake at a uranium fuel processing plant which put two workers in critical condition). Regardless, Yuuji Shinoda tries to figure out what to do about Godzilla's onslaught, and Yuuji should know; after all, he left some university to establish a domestic network of Godzilla-related information geared toward the prediction of Godzilla's attacks.

Número Two-o: While Godzilla continues to step on things, we learn more about the human characters' 'distinctive personalities'. Scientist Yuuji Shinoda (Takehiro Murata) continues to be determined to understand Godzilla and pursue him, much like a character or two from GODZILLA 1985. Yuuji's assistant Yuki Ichinose (this condition can be solved with skin moisturizers) helps in the noble researcher's plight. Anyway, it's



MAYA SUZUKI

Date of Birth: March 17th, 1988

Place of Birth: Saitama.

Yikes! Many Japanese monster movies feature kids, so Maya Suzuki is the token annoying child for GODZILLA 2000. According to press releases, her character (for what it's worth) Iyo is "a quickly matured daughter who supports her father." Whatever. GODZILLA 2000 is her first major role, but has also been in commercials for the product 'Shaldan Ace'.

TRAP FAMILY (1998)
GODZILLA 2000 (1999)

determined that yet again, Godzilla is interested in mankind's nuclear stuff, but with a twist: It's suspected Godzilla hates the atomic energy that mankind creates, instead of consuming it. So there's a method to Godzilla's madness.

Número Nemuro: Godzilla wipes out of the entire city of Nemuro. He also battles and defeats the military, proving he's got more stamina, male potency and machismo; since their long, erect, body-penetrating, heat-seeking missiles are only computer-generated, and do little to arouse Godzilla. It's here that I saw a particularly cool effect: When Yuki is listening to Yuuji, watch the exploding water in the background. This is one of the neatest usages of CGI FX in the movie, and is a nice way to initiate Godzilla's battle with the military.

Número Four-o: In some deep underwater crack (off the coast of Kashime Nada Ibaragi Prefecture), among a huge pile of stones, a giant meteor (which had been, ugh, sleeping since it crashed 6,000 years ago last Thursday) is discovered by dorky scientist Shiroo Miyasaka (Shiro Sano) of the group C.C.I. He looks like the type who got tormented in school and called "Four Eyes". Later, when he got glasses, people started calling him "Six Eyes". But seriously, his education paid off and he learned how to detect 200-meter meteors in the ocean floor who come to life and learn to fly. The flying rock, complete with special effects which rival

some of the better scenes in the 1970s Sid & Marty Kroft "classic" LOST SAUCER, flies over to attack Godzilla, allowing for a truly breath-taking shot (making up for the flying stone's crappy CGI effects) of Godzilla getting blasted and crashing backwards into some buildings. When Godzilla spits the on the flying rock we finally see what we already guessed was going to happen: It turns out to be a flying saucer, albeit a funny-looking one. The explosive conflict sends Godzilla back underwater (end of round one) and Orga's computer-generated domain crashlands on the until-recently-peaceful village of Tokai.

Numero Five-α: But before the inevitable giant monster duel, there's dialogue as Shinoda & Miyasaki (old schoolmates) cooperate to make the film talky and remind us of their "distinctive personalities," analyze the now-stationary UFO (which has perched itself on top of a sky-scraper), and of course, examine a Godzilla cell (here we go again!). In the process they make scriptwriters more overtime by discussing some discovery that Godzilla must be the key to the secrets of the earth's living matter. Wow, dude; like, cosmic. It makes me want to announce, "Make Me One With Everything," but the people at Burger King would misinterpret this. Whatever. Worse yet, by now we've been introduced to yet another couple of unimportant human characters: An obsessive soldier (Hiroshi Abe) whom Godzilla later kills, and an irritating little



KENJI SUZUKI

鈴木健

KENJI SUZUKI



Special effects director Kenji Suzuki (AKA "Kiyoshi" Suzuki)
Born: 7/9/57; Ibaraki

"Kiyoshi Suzuki" is the name he used, or rather, the name which appears in the credits for the English-language (English adaptation: David Weir & Michael Bakewell for World Wide Sound/London) episodes of Masaaki Sakai's SAIYUKI (NTV; 1978), the Monkey King series which made its debut on 10/1/78. Whether you know him as Kenji or Kiyoshi, Mr. Suzuki has been a major force in the rebirth of Godzilla in the 1990s, having helped direct special effects under Koichi Kawakita in the Godzilla series after 1991's GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORAH. Kenji Suzuki has also worked on DAUOHBU MY FRIEND (1983), TAMPOPO (1985), REBIRTH OF MOTHRA (1996), and REBIRTH OF MOTHRA 3 (1998). He's considered one of the top special effects specialists in Japan, and said the following: "In designing the concept of this new Godzilla, I aimed for a smotheringly 'cool' Godzilla which also has a primitive roughness deep inside. These features are visible in many parts, such as the face, dorsal fins and the neck muscles, but the biggest are the changes in the dorsal fins. They are now much bigger, sharper and more menacing. The color also changed from white to purple, to match the skin color which is now deep green. As the title 'Godzilla 2000: Millennium' suggests, I wish to show, both externally as well as in Godzilla's actions, its strength of mind. I hope this new Godzilla will become the character that marks the beginning of a new era."



girl played by Maya Suzuki, whom Godzilla does not kill, unfortunately.

Numero Six-α: By now, Orga's UFO gets better and, like Godzilla, gets a fancy for the fashionable Shinjuku district (mainly a miniature Shinjuku set shot in July, 1999), a place that I remember as being full of over-priced malls (though I've not been to Japan since the 1980s), and this is the Big G's second time there; he trashed it in GODZILLA 1985 too. Orga itself finally shows its ugly face (and ugly body), so the two behemoths can have their climactic free-for-all. The battle is decent, about equal to that of the Heisei stuff, which it seems more than derivative of. The tentacles wrapping around

Godzilla look more than similar to scenes in GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE. Orga tries to eat Godzilla, and in doing so, displays some Godzilla-like characteristics, which reminds me too much of BIOLLANTE and SPACE GODZILLA! Wasn't this the whole reason the idea of GODZILLA VS. GODZILLA was canned?! Anyway, Godzilla defeats Orga, and then comes a trick ending which honestly caught me off guard: Godzilla isn't defeated by mankind, nor does he retreat to the sea. Instead, he completes his rampage! The movie ends with Godzilla destroying buildings! The ending credits role as Godzilla continues his onslaught, to make way for the upcoming GODZILLA 2001.

The movie itself struck me as only being okay, but the ending is downright good! THE END!

So there you have it, my views on the latest Godzilla film. I believe I enjoyed it more than I enjoyed GODZILLA 1985 & GODZILLA VS. BICILLANTE, but otherwise, I found the other Heisei films to be more lively and imaginative—and I won't do GODZILLA 2000 an unfair injustice by comparing it with the classics of the 1960s or the 1970s, the only Godzilla film series true to my heart. On the whole, my opinion doesn't fit in with the two different, clear cut views of GODZILLA 2000. I heard some fans say it's an "Either you love it, or hate it" film. I did neither, though there are a few beautifully executed shots (i.e. the flying meteor hovering in the background past Godzilla as the camera pans) that I loved. I watched the film almost all the way through and it wasn't especially boring, but I did have to joke around to get through it, as the tone of this article shows. Let me put it this way: GODZILLA 2000 is an absolutely excellent comeback for the King of Monsters, after the atrocious Tri-Star movie. But GODZILLA 2000 lacks the heart, fun and colorful approach of the later Heisei films. On the whole, I say GODZILLA 2000 is fair, okay, so-so, perhaps even average. Godzilla moves slowly and is kind of boring, I think it's Godzilla, not the humans, who should have the "distinctive personality", or rather, "distinctive monstrosity". Godzilla's slow movements, and the nighttime setting (I prefer sunshine) are definitely for fans of GODZILLA, KING OF THE MONSTERS, which has never been one of my favorites. Give me more exciting times; when we got to see King Seesar and Gigan. ** -Damon Foster



大河原孝夫

Takao Okawara, director
[also spelled Takao Ohkawara]
Born: 12/20/49; Tokyo

Takao Okawara entered Toho in '73, and has since become known to make highly entertaining films. Takao Okawara worked as assistant director under major directors like Akira Kurosawa (during production of KAGEMUSHA: THE SHADOW WARRIORS) and Shiro Maruya, in that crappy SUBMER-SION OF JAPAN (A.K.A. TIDAL WAVE, with Lorne Greene).

Okawara's directorial debut was 1991's SUPER GIRL REIKO [where he worked with Shomei Tezuka, an assistant director who helped out on a Heisei Godzilla film or two], where he wrote the award-winning script. GODZILLA 2000 will be his 4th Godzilla movie. He was also involved in pre-production of GODZILLA 2000, having heated, long arguments about how Godzilla should look in this new movie. American fans can also see the director's work in the video rental OROCHI, THE EIGHT-HEADED DRAGON (Toho, 1994), known in Japan under its original title "Yamato Takeru" (more or less a remake of 1959's THE THREE TREASURES, based on "Koyuki," a fantasy novel about Japan's creation).

According to Dave Milner's informative, online interview <<http://users.gdnt.com/~kajuy/okawara.htm>> with Okawara, Godzilla was originally going to be killed in GODZILLA VS. MECHAGODZILLA, because he felt the death (of Godzilla) is what made GODZILLA, KING OF THE MONSTERS (Toho; 1954) such a powerful movie. Though Toho ultimately rejected this idea, it's an example of Takao Okawara's determination to keep his Godzilla stories traditional—and it certainly shows in GODZILLA 2000. So Okawara had this to say about Godzilla's latest Japanese re-birth, at Toho's official website <<http://www.godzilla.co.jp/>> for the movie GODZILLA 2000: "This Godzilla has all the charm and characteristics of the original Godzilla, as well as some new features."

Toho originally planned the climax to the Heisei series to be called GODZILLA VS. GODZILLA [Godzilla's ghost would materialize



forty years after the Oxygen Destroyer destroyed Godzilla. The split was going to gradually materialize into a solid Godzilla, and then that Godzilla was going to do battle with the Godzilla seen in the previous Heisei Godzilla films). But this was changed because of previous films like GODZILLA VS. MECHAGODZILLA and GODZILLA VS. SPACE GODZILLA, it was felt that Godzilla had battled too many versions of himself. So in the end, Toho opted to end the series and make way for Tri-Star's new time-line; the last of the Japanese Heisei movies being GODZILLA VS. DESTROYER.

Okawara also had this to say: "I think we have also defined the role of the enemy pretty clearly. We also see the personalities clash among the people who meet in GODZILLA 2000, including the four protagonists. I think this will be deep (meaningful) enough to mark the beginning of a new series. There are, of course, some humorous or comical scenes, and lots of action - enough to make this a super-entertaining action movie as well as a powerful Godzilla movie."

- GODZILLA 1985 (chief assistant director under Hashimoto Koji)
- SUPER-GIRL REIKO (1991; directorial debut)
- GODZILLA VS. MOTHIRA (1992; director)
- GODZILLA VS. MECHAGODZILLA (1993; director)
- GODZILLA VS. DESTROYER (1995; director)
- OROCHI, THE EIGHT-HEADED DRAGON (1994; director)
- ABDUCTION (1997; director)



HONG KONG HEROES



1960s:

THE BRAIN STEALERS

A Shaw Brothers Production, Producer: Run Run Shaw, Directed by Umetasugu Inoue, Music by Wong Foo Ling, Costumes: Chen Pi Hui, Cast: Lily Ho, Peter Chi, Chin Feng, Betty Ting Pei, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Years before Wang Yu made martial arts cinema history for working with Japanese in ZATO ICHI MEETS HIS EQUAL, there was this odd little co-production which looks like a hybrid of HK's SUMMONS TO DEATH (see Q.C.: The Jackie Chan Issue) and Japan's WHAT'S UP TIGER LILY (see Q.C.: Chow Yun Fat And The Monkey King). The "Tiger Lily" in this film is none other than 1960s superstar Lily Ho, see the article on her elsewhere in this issue. Interesting to note that the article claims she appeared in THE ONE-ARMED SWORDSMAN. Though I don't deny that this Shaw actress appeared in several sword-films, I have watched THE ONE-ARMED SWORDSMAN (gearing up for next issue's Jimmy Wang Yu tribute) recently and didn't recognize her anywhere in the movie, and I suspect the mentioning of the film was a mistake. Though I don't know what she looks like today, or if she was ever really a "Ho," she's quite beautiful in SUMMONS TO DEATH. In tacky spy-capers like this, the gals have to look ravishing 24 hours a day (plus an additional 24 hours a night!), so in her shower before the bedroom scene, her hair never gets wet and absolutely none of her abundant make-up comes off. It's just plain dumb fun, but it's easy to see why secret agent farces like this are better off as comedies, like the Austin Powers movies. Anyway, I was seeking this movie for well over ten years, and I'm happy to have finally gotten it and be able to review it for you. Though it gets slow in parts, and the subtitles are cropped left & right, I still say it's

decent entertainment, and recommendable to anybody who enjoyed other Chinese 1960s James Bond ripoffs like SUMMONS TO DEATH and ANGEL WITH THE IRON FISTS (see Q.C.: The Femme Fatales Issue). Bruce Lee freaks may also want to take note, because there's a guest appearance by the woman whom some think accidentally killed Lee's career by doing the same to his life. Betty Ting Pei looks fairly young here; much younger than she did in Samuel Hui's NAUGHTY NAUGHTY (see Q.C.: The Modern HK Action Issue), which is what leads me to suspect that THE BRAIN STEALERS came out in the mid-1960s. I'm guessing it was around 1966, 1967 or 1968. From a physical standpoint, I've always thought Ting Pei was a beautiful actress, she still looked good in 1984's BRUCE LEE: THE LEG-END (see Q.C.: The Sammo Hung Issue), which I suspect is her last film appearance. Last I saw of her was when she was interviewed on ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT in 1993 (she talked about her devotion to Buddhism). Regardless, seeing vintage 1960s footage of Ting Pei (a superstar waiting to happen; but for all the wrong reasons!) is comparable to seeing Bruce Lee was doing at that same point in time: Getting a secondary role in THE GREEN HORNET. As with the old Lee stuff, your eyes automatically gravitate toward Ting Pei in THE BRAIN STEALERS, for the sheer novelty of it.

Though it takes itself too seriously and is too talky for international appeal, THE BRAIN STEALERS may offer a chuckle to superhero fans. Villainous Dr. Zero reminds me a lot of KAMEN RIDER V3 nemesis Dr. G, and the madman's elaborate yet chincy domain looks like them Shaws were warming up to make their INFRAMAN laboratory set, ten or so years in advance. Naturally, the target audience, however is the James

Bond crowd. There are no elaborate stunts or exploding motor-boats, but what THE BRAIN STEALERS lacks in ambition, it makes up for in imagination and heart.

Lily Ho plays Hsiao Lan, a judo-tossing (I guess back then, even the Chinese considered judo the "cutting edge" of martial arts in pop-culture) heroine she may have played in other films, including ANGEL WITH THE IRON FISTS (it finally dawned on me that both movies are part of the same series!). Her martial art of choice is judo, perhaps because of Japanese involvement (there are Japanese characters in the story, but they're not all evil—that was a concept Wang Yu tried to force down our throats), in a story which goes back & forth from HK to Tokyo. The bad guys are commanded by the mysterious, scarred phantom, Dr. Zero, and they're after a secret formula invented by a scientist who also happens to be our lead heroine's father. Dr. Zero has the hots for Lily Ho, commands henchmen who like kidnapping scientists and even has this high-tech machine where, if you strap people to its "electric chairs," their minds are switched, allowing Dr. Zero's henchman Peter to impersonate the professor's son. The good guys noticed something was wrong when their friend (with the brain transplant) began doing things he hadn't done before, like drinking, smoking, using his right hand, and finally trying to rape his own sister! In-between sappy, tacky, embarrassing interludes, there are occasional judo spats. The martial arts fights are a lot of fun, even though they're crude and badly staged. Some of the special effects are so cheap, you really gotta' suspend your disbelief. Like the scene where Lily Ho is attacked by an obviously fake owl—oh well, at least we know for once that a real animal wasn't harmed. The scene of treacher

(continued on page 13)

何莉莉 LILY HO WALKING THROUGH THE PAST 走過從前

When Teresa Teng died, we didn't see her best friend Miss Mok at the funeral. However, many other friends did show up, including Lily Ho. Lily also appeared at many Hong Kong and Taiwanese events in Teresa's honor. She is the wife of a wealthy family, has her own fashion business and was a top draw for the Shaw Bros. in her hey-day. So Lily's name is not uncommon in the newspapers even today. Just listen to One of Hong Kong's Super Women: "I got into the movie business at age 15 and got married (when I was 25) to Ju Ti Kwang." Before marriage she made several famous movies. These include BOAT, THE ONE-ARMED SWORDSMAN, LOVE SLAVE and YOUNG DRUMMER. All together she appeared in about 30 films. "During this period, I won the Asia Filmfest Best Actress Award. When I chose to retire from films it was at the peak of my career, so I had to be very determined to leave it. I believe the ideal place for a woman is in the family. I wanted to find a new world, a new challenge. I never think of going back to the movie business. When I got married I stayed home to raise my 3 daughters and 1 son. I didn't know much about business, but later my husband wanted me to go to his company to learn management. I was very scared every time I received a letter from a lawyer. My whole body would shake. I didn't even like to travel by myself in airplanes. If not for my husband's push for me to learn about the shipping business I'd still be at home."

In the interview, Lily Ho also stated: "Ten years ago my husband's family's business Wah Kwang Shipping went into crisis because of the international economic depression. After the struggle we overcame the



difficulty and then decided not to concentrate on a single business. We became a multi-business conglomerate. Now we own shipping, clothing, construction, and food companies. I concentrate on Lily Co., which is mostly doing business in China. I spend an average of seven months outside of Hong Kong each year. My husband says I'm well-trained. I believe it's my determination to succeed that has made this possible. When in business you have to know how to be reasonable with that principle in mind, you can solve any issue that comes along. I grew up in Taiwan but I developed in HK. After the HK people heard my good Mandarin and my good business sense, they began to call me 'Smart Taiwanese Daughter-in-Law', but I think they respect me more because I do everything myself. I have abundant energy and treat everyone with honesty". (NOTE: The preceding article was translated from the Hong Kong movie magazine, CINEMART #302, from August of 1995. Thanks to Darren Wheeling and Kam Lee for translating the piece. -DF/



ous, sultry Betty Ting Pei's death is funny too, when she's pushed into a pool of acid and turns into a Styrofoam skeleton. This is toward the climax, shortly before Lily Ho and her team of male helpers blow up the enemy headquarters and kill all the bad guys. *** -DF

1970s:

THE SWORD

Golden Harvest; 1979, Dir.: Tan Siang, Producer: Raymond Chow, Cost: Adam Cheng, Bai Siu Keung (AKA Norman Chu), Chen Qiqi, Tien Feng, Xu Xu, Eddie Koo Sheng, Reviewed by Damon Foster

The only reason I sat through this mess of a fantasy was because of a false lead; some website about Jimmy Wang Yu said he was in this confusing caper. I had planned on reviewing this in next issue's proposed Wang Yu section. So I dug out my videotape of 1979's *THE SWORD* (there are some sources which say it came out in 1978, and others which indicate it was 1980—but on the movie itself, Golden Harvest copyrights it 1979) which I recorded off a Chinese TV station back in that ancient time-period, the 1980s. I had already watched & reviewed it in a much older OC, but since that issue is sold out (even I don't have any copies left), I couldn't simply scan through the article to determine Wang Yu's prominence in this farce. So here I am, sitting through this complex film, getting bored and frustrated; just waiting for Wang Yu's supposed appearance. He's not in it, so naturally I won't put this review in next

issue's Wang Yu tribute, but since this issue's Hong Kong Heroes needs to be padded out, and I need to meet my quota for this issue, my sitting through the movie won't be a complete waste of time.

Eventually, heroic Adam Cheng (later of *FUNG SAI YUKS 1 & 2*) finally crosses swords with villainous Norman Chu (AKA Tsui Siu Keung), best known as lead hero of both *WE'RE GOING TO EAT YOU ALIVE* and *BLOOD RITUAL*. The two of them go at it, clanging swords at high speed, and jumping all around, being heavily stunt-doubled and making use of headache inducing, high speed edits (so the stuntmen aren't so obvious). By this time, I came to realize I had sat through this pretentious flick for nothing; Wang Yu was simply not present. The internet website had made an honest mistake, so I had to do some research on my own.

By the time Adam Cheng chopped Norman Chu in half (a neat effect, the best shot in *THE SWORD* '79), I had consulted with that big red book, *The Encyclopedia of Martial Arts Movies* (authors: Bill & Karen Palmer, and Ric Meyers), a useful if not over-priced book. I should have done this in the beginning! The book says there are in fact two movies called *THE SWORD*! Wang Yu's *THE SWORD* came out in 1971!

Regardless, I sat through the 1979 film, and might as well be productive about this, so let me finish this god damn review once and for all. Swordsman Adam Cheng seeks out another swordsman, Tien Feng, for a challenge. Meanwhile, there's some sword which causes bad luck to whoever owns it,

and Tien Feng owns it, he ends up killed in the night, by an assassin played by Eddie Koo (AKA Koo Sheng). Let's see, what else happened? Oh yeah, a bunch of talky, romantic bullshit and over-used music. Norman Chu plays a villain, and we know he's a villain because he beats up some chick. So toward the movie's end, Adam Cheng duels with and then chops him in half. The sword fights hint to that whole FX-enhanced deterioration which would ruin most 1990s martial arts movies, but if this confusing caper had English voice-dubbing instead of half-ass subtitles, I might have liked it more. ** -DF

IN THE BEGINNING

Young Man Film Co. Ltd., Presented by Hsu Yang-Kung, Supervisor: Wang Tsao Jung, Screenplay: Chang Yung Hsing, Starring: Yueh Hua, Chen Hsin, Lin Yu Wu, Jean Esang-Su, Reviewed by Damon Foster

After some crappy opening animation of a Chinese tiger, I was expecting something fun like *STORY OF CHINESE GODS* or *ALAKAZAM THE GREAT*. But this was nullified right after the opening credits, when the farce turned out to be a terrible live-action fantasy (with the usual stolen stock-music; in this case, *RYAN'S SONG* and *PETER AND THE WOLF* come to mind) which looks rather like a combination of *THE FAIRY AND THE DEVIL* and Korea's *TYRANNO'S CLAW*! I tell ya, I gotta' get out of this business, and choose something like stamp collecting, or feces-eating, for that matter, as my new hobby. But seriously, *IN THE BEGINNING* is a poor film, almost as poor & unfortunate as those of us who have got to sit through it. At times, I thought it was two completely different movies hastily edited together, much like *HORROR OF THE BLOOD MONSTERS*. Again caverns are abruptly edited in and around non-cavern settings. But because Chinese fantasy makers are the most irrational, scatterbrained in existence, it wouldn't surprise me if the uneven approach was intentional.

IN THE BEGINNING blatantly swipes whole special effects sequences from *ONE MILLION YEARS B.C.* I don't know if Hammer Films okayed this or not, but there are several Ray Harryhausen scenes spliced in! There's even a brief glimpse of Rachel Welch (I never thought I would see her in a low budget Chinese kung fu movie!). How do them Chinese always get away with this? Well, at least now we can say Yuen Wah appears in a Rachel Welch movie!



Hell, it's so obvious that the animated dinosaurs are stock footage; the color & film grain changes dramatically in these shots. These pieces are cropped strangely too, and this sudden switch to a semi-letterboxed format makes it all the more blatant that these inserts weren't meant to be here. Continuity-wise, the "Harryhausen highlights" are feasible; it's as though this is what's going on over in Europe simultaneously, while the Chinese characters are going on their comparatively lame adventures. However, this rationale dies when we realize that the European cavemen have quality furs, where as the Asian cavemen ("Cave Chinamen?") wear cheap plastic skirts meant to resemble leaves. But the Cave Chinamen speak real Chinese, putting them ahead of the whites, since Rachel Welch, Tomak and her tribesmen presumably only know the grunts heard in ONE MILLION YEARS B.C.

There are also sequences involving traditional Chinese fairies (when I say fairies, I'm referring to angels, not homosexuals or boats), in what I presume to be the Chinese "Heaven," because it does look much like the sets in Monkey King tales. However, it's hard to tell some times, this talky movie lacks English translation of any kind. These dialogue-heavy sequences drag on forever too, and look typical of cheap costume-dramas. However, they do have a couple decent kung fu spats, which is more than can be said for the lame-ass skirmishes between the cavemen. The "Heavenly" scenes also feature the movie's only familiar face (not including Rachel Welch's few seconds of screentime), former Shaw star Yueh Hua (see bio on page 9 of *O.C.: Chow Yun Fat & The Monkey King*). He appears off & on, throughout IN THE BEGINNING, and yet I still suspect all his shots were filmed in a day or two, before he grabbed his paycheck and bailed.

The "highlights" of this variation on the old and-god-created-humans theme is the delightfully cheap special effects. They're so bad they amuse. From the talking butterflies (w/ human faces) to the unbelievably chincy multi-headed hydra which marauds at the climax, IN THE BEGINNING is an unintended comedy, minus the humor. -DF

George Garvey

All right, you art-house trash; listen up! I'm only going to say this once! Your fantasy woman, Brigitte Lin Ching Hsia stars in this film which you probably won't like. Why? It's a boot camp film! No period costumes, no Tsui Hark, no art-house crap!!

In 1975, at the age of 19, Brigitte Lin and her two friends, all from well-to-do families, join the Taiwanese army. Now, if you want to believe rich people joining the enlisted ranks is an every day thing, that's another story. Anyway, Brigitte Lin and friends report for duty. They quickly adapt to their new surroundings. Brigitte Lin becomes a model recruit. The usual boot camp film hi-jinks center around training, trying to get away with things, etc. Watch Brigitte Lin & friends train in artillery, take part in naval exercises, study close air support!! And that nationalist party music is never far away, blaring in the background when you least expect it. Funny thing is, it's very catchy! Another thing, none of the recruits are fat, dorky, orumpy-looking in anyway. Even the commander is played by 1970s kung fu gal Judy Lee and her subordinates are kinda' hot looking! The film's "emotional core" comes when Brigitte Lin's friend comes down with leukemia. She begs the commander to let her finish boot camp. She makes it with a little help from Brigitte Lin. Now time for the graduation ceremony. Blue & white uniforms, martial music, proud relatives, sunshine! Brigitte Lin leads her comrades in the parade! This film may sound corny, but it's actually fun! All right now - 1,2,3,4- "The sun shines on our vast China from mountains to the sea, on Taiwan the bell of freedom we sing of our Great China!" The end! *** -George Garvey

SURVIVAL OF A DRAGON

Dir: Lam Yung. Screenplay: Ku Lung. Based on a novel by: Yi Kan. Supervisor: Joseph Lai, Assistant Supervisor: Stephen So. Producers: Squall Hung, Lim Mao Yui. English Version: Vaughan Savage, Martial Arts Dir: Squall Hung. Starring: Squall Hung, Jasper Lee, Alan Lau, Rosa Lee, Wei Ping Jo, Wong Chung, Yu Ping, Lucia Cheung, Tsui Yok Wai, Wong Man Pu. Reviewed by Damon Foster.

That kind of villainous whimps, We Ping Ao is the only familiar face, and I suspect he was the only "big name" Hong Kongese performer flown out to Korea to make this movie. I can't actually tell if this dumb movie is really a Korean film, or a HK flick shot in Korea, however. Hell, I also can't con-

firm for a fact that it was shot in Korea, but I do suspect so, because the locales remind me of those in Korean-setting films, there's a lack of familiar faces, and also there's a certain crudeness that often, even the cheapest HK stinkers lack. The reason I chose this flick to rent over many others was because of an interesting premise: A medieval warrior goes on a timewarp and ends up in modern times, and this one predates Yuen Biao's ICEMAN COMETH by at least ten years. There have been other movies with this premise, like Hiroshi (KAMEN RIDER) Fujioka's American disaster, GHOST WARRIOR. Tales of time travel are always interesting, like stories of people from the past coming to our period and getting puzzled by our technology. Time-travel has always fascinated me. To be able to go into the past and attend historic events (Elvis Presley's birth, The Hindenburg, Jesus Christ's first Barmizvah, etc.) would be the ultimate experience.

However, SURVIVAL OF A DRAGON misses the mark, it seems that these independent (nearly amateur, by our standards) filmmakers just aren't equipped for such a project, and thus, SURVIVAL OF A DRAGON falls short. The beginning is okay, as people do some time traveling and must get used to being in a new environment, but once the ancient warriors get used to being in the 20th century, and get their hair cut & wear modern (1970s modern; that is) clothes, SURVIVAL OF A DRAGON degenerates to being a typically bad, urban chop-socky caper; and it really defeats the whole purpose of such a premise. On the whole, as average kung fu, the movie succeeds. The kung fu battles aren't bad, they do entertain— though Koreans are better at tae kwon do than Chinese swordplay, and it certainly shows.

The transition of time-periods is quite rushed; it's too hasty. It seems that a lightning bolt zaps a coal mine and changes it into a time-portal, so some chick named Helen, while exploring this cave, finds herself in the Sung Dynasty. The effect is done by showing a still cut-out of her, against a backdrop of some animated "whirlwind" effect. Still cut-outs aren't uncommon effects in Korean films, Shim Hyung Rei used them, and they would be ridiculously over used in the Korean camp classic SUPER BATMAN AND MAZINGA V. So anyway, like I said, this sends her back to the past. The brief scenes of her in that time period were shot out in the countryside with a few

中國女兵

THE WOMEN SOLDIERS

1975, Cast: Brigitte Lin Ching Hsia, Judy Lee, Reviewed by

shacks & temples nearby, but the illusion of her back being in that time isn't convincing. Worse yet, the swordplay in these scenes is way too slow, and the choreography could be better. To defend herself against bandits or other villains, she freaks them all out using the flash-bulb on her camera. Regardless, she befriends a heroic swordsman or two, and they go back through the coal mine, and return to modern times. This is where the movie goes downhill, with the Sung warrior becoming modernized. I thought the whole gimmick would be to see him in his traditional robe, battling modern gangsters. The latter half of the movie has our hero get hired as an athlete in some race, where he outruns all the other competitors. Wei Ping Ao, who lost money in a bet, gets mad and decides to frame our boy. But the compromising photo doesn't help the villains, since they get their asses kicked by the good guys. After the cops come and arrest Wei Ping Ao, the movie abruptly ends, and we never find out whether the old-fashioned warriors go back to their own period or stay in the 1970s. ** -Damon Foster

1980s:

EDGE OF DARKNESS

Producer: Phillip Chan Yan-kin, Executive Producers: John Shum, Wang Ying Cheung, Dir.: Fung Hak-on, Cast: Alex Man Chi-leung, John Shum Kim Fun, Ivy Chan Yuk-ai, Reviewed by Andrew Grossman

This is an underrated, often overlooked cop film/film noir, made when, in the wake of *A BETTER TOMORROW* (1986), most HK action movies were romanticizing the morally ambiguous (yet righteous) gangster hero. The hero of this film (Alex Man) is not a triad but an undercover cop, caught amongst the wife he must keep his job a secret from, his morally dubious police chief, and the triad gangs who forever test his loyalty. Although we really never doubt the cop hero's loyalty to his job and never think he will sympathize with the triads he infiltrates, he nevertheless fits somewhere into the mold of the film noir hero who must walk the line between the law and criminality. The film is really as much about how Man will prove his loyalty to his triad bosses—who we may sympathize with more than Man ever does—as it is about how Man must come to terms with the wife who mistrusts him even more than the triads do. The film is in general far more real-

istic than either Hollywood treatments of similar themes or the moralistic, simplistic Danny Lee cop movies that flooded HK in the early and mid-1980s. With many well-shot, gritty street scenes and precious little sunlight, the film is clearly striving for a darker and more sophisticated approach to the genre. What makes the film even richer is that the villains are not one-dimensional stereotypes: They are nearly as complex as the hero, and are often portrayed as victims themselves of desperate circumstances. When a villain's wife begs mercy for him, it is an unusual and humanizing moment we don't see often. In fact, it comes across as rather thoughtful that the filmmakers would write such a dramatic scene for the wife, who is an extremely minor character. If only HK screenwriters still payed that much attention to detail.

There are only two shoot-outs in the film, but they are both extremely well-handled and unusually exciting. The first shootout is a close-quarters battle in a restaurant that holds our attention even after it is over; and because such massacres do not occur every ten minutes (as in some HK gunplay movies of the period), the killings seem that much more significant in the story. The violence here is cold, desperate, and abrupt; director Fung Hak-on handles the action matter-of-factly, without any glamorous Woo-style slow motion. The film is also different from gangster-hero HK film noirs of the period, such as *ON THE RUN*, *AS TEARS GO BY*, or *MY HEART IS THAT ETERNAL ROSE* (all made in 1988, in fact) in that it refuses to romanticize its cop hero's fate. In so far as this "romanticization" often takes the form of stylish noir lighting effects and cinematography, *EDGE OF DARKNESS* is less obviously stylish than any of those films. Its photography is competent without being slick, and rather than the director forcing style down your throat as soon as the credits roll, the film's moodiness is created naturally from the story and slowly catches up with you. In the end, you may be thankful for its straightforward narrative, which lets you enjoy a very well-told story without any frills. On the other hand, the realism of this film is in keeping with the realism that is traditionally given to the police genre. The film's realism may also have allowed producer Phillip Chan Yan-kin, a former police officer who left the force after the ICAC corruption investigations of the 1970s, a rare chance to apply his life experience to a serious police story (his other credits include

police comedies like 1984's *RETURN OF POM POM* and 1986's *WHERE'S OFFICER TUBA*). Indeed, the overall high quality of the film may be attributable to Chan and executive producer John Shum Kim Fun, since director Fung Hak-on is mainly known for his second unit/action directing (1987's *MAGNIFICENT WARRIORS*, 1988's *GUNMEN*) and not his limp solo flights as director (1991's *GODFATHER'S DAUGHTER*, *MAFIA BULES*).

You may be able to guess some of the plot twists; the 1990 HK film *NO WAY BACK*, also an undercover cop story, borrows heavily from this film, I think. But some of the plot you will probably not guess, including the serious-minded ending, which is largely (though not entirely) unconventional, and which raises the film well above most specimens of the genre. The film also gives co-star John Shum Kim Fun, usually a comic performer and indeed providing this film with its few light moments, an unusual chance to make his typically bumbling cop character heroic at the film's end. **** -Andrew Grossman

1990s:

BLACK SUN: THE NANKING MASSACRE

TF Film Company, 1995, Dir.: T.F. Mous (AKA TF Mous S. & Mao Dai Fa), Script: Lee Wing Shui, Cast: Cheung Leung, Poon Wing, Hung Si Tin, Reviewed by Andrew Grossman

Director T.F. Mous is best-known to Western filmgoers through his 1988 World War Two docudrama *MAN BEHIND THE SUN* (AKA *BLACK SUN 731*), a film whose relentlessly graphic, yet historically documented, depiction of the chemical weapons experiments visited upon Japan's prisoners of war often keeps it at the top of peoples' "Ten Most Disturbing Films" lists. Mous returns to chronicling the horrors of Japanese imperialism with *BLACK SUN: THE NANKING MASSACRE* (Mouse did not, as is sometimes reported, direct the two early 1990s ripoffs of *MAN BEHIND THE SUN*, and is in fact openly critical of them). Like his earlier film, this is a low-budget and entirely sincere effort culled from (non-Japanese) historical records, a movie which treats the line between coldly bearing witness to wartime horrors and inviting us to sympathize with the characters who must suffer them. This film, though brutal enough to easily earn its HK "Category 3" rating for violence, has probably not received the notoriety of *MAN BEHIND THE SUN* because it's tightly con-

structed and often moving narrative reduces the chances for it to be misinterpreted as being merely a series of gory spectacles designed for cult movie hipsters. Indeed, at a 1998 screening of *MAN BEHIND THE SUN* at Toronto's Fantasia Film Festival, many in the college-age audience applauded and laughed at the onscreen war atrocities, apparently unable to distinguish the serious intentions of the film from blackly comic Category 3 HK shockers such as *RUN AND KILL* (1993) or *THE UNTOLD STORY* (1993).

Like many low-budget films that deal in horror, *NANKING MASSACRE* actually benefits from its threadbare resources: The film is ugly, grainy, depressing. Unlike, say, *SCHINDLER'S LIST*, there is no beautiful cinematography, no haunting score to underline moments of emotion, no "award-winning" performances. But the film is also different from other Chinese movies about the violence of Japanese imperialists. The tone of this film is somewhere inbetween the big-budget *DON'T CRY, NANKING* (also 1995; produced by John Woo) and the Wong Jing-produced melodramatic pot-

boiler 1941 *HONG KONG ON FIRE* (1995). The film is neither grandiose nor exploitive, although I am sure that won't stop some people from voyeuristically "enjoying" the film's moments of violence, which are obviously meant to shock and not amuse. Yet although this film contains dismemberments, babies thrown into boiling water, and a woman whose unborn fetus is ripped from her stomach by an insane Japanese soldier's bayonet, anyone who has read historical accounts of the 1937 Rape of Nanking will know that even worse atrocities were committed than what is shown here onscreen.

As in *MAN BEHIND THE SUN*, there are onscreen titles whenever a new character shows up to tell us the real historical figure the character is supposed to represent, and there are many characters here, from the Buddhist monk who is the Japanese army's official "corpse collector" to variously sadistic Japanese officers. But the film's central focus is on the Chinese family which struggles to survive the terror. Also interesting is the (unfortunately under-developed) presence of European aid workers

who are powerless to prevent the massacres (and who are also poorly dubbed into Chinese). The cause of the Japanese soldiers' violent acts is shown here as being the result of both Japanese soldiers caught up in the heat of madness but also as the result (as an onscreen caption tells us) of Emperor Hirohito's official orders stating that Japanese soldiers in occupied China need not abide by previous rules of "civilized" warfare. Importantly, director Mous lays most of the blame on the Japanese high officials whose policies encouraged the atrocities, and not the Japanese soldiers themselves. Indeed, the film spends almost as much time coldly documenting the meetings and genocidal strategies of the Japanese military officers (who are presented without sympathy) as it does on the more standard "human" story of the terrified Chinese family. The film also makes extensive use of fascinating documentary footage (probably taken by the Japanese themselves) to demonstrate that the film's events have not been exaggerated. Not a film for thrill-seekers; instead, it is a good history lesson, and, dare I say it, an important film. *** 1/2 - Andrew Grossman

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KAIZO NINGEN UPDATE



("Kaizo Ningen" roughly means 'mysterious human', and is a popular phrase in Japanese superhero programs)

Here we go with another edition of our continuing look at Japanese superheroes. Then there Japanese (over in Japan) just keep on cranking out these TV shows & videos faster than I can write about them! This time, we presented Part One (hopefully it will continue in future issues) of Frank Strom's detailed look at the work of Go Nagai, and while we're on the topic of animated robots, let's not forget Korea's UREME 3. Also, though I've finally gotten enough antacid to stomach GO GO 5 in this issue, I still have yet to catch up and critique the previous Sentai GINGAMAN, and of course the new TIME RANGER (which is currently airing in Japan). There are more new superhero movies & TV shows coming out than I can possibly cover, so that's about it for this edition of "Kaizo Ningen Update". Meanwhile, them Tsuburayas continue to crank out endless Ultraman movies & TV shows with names like "Tiga" "Dyna" and "Gaya"; not to mention infinite shot-on-video sequels to ULTRASEVEN. It's damn near impossible to keep up with all this new "Ultra" stuff. Speaking of classic superheroes who are now being shown on video format, Toei's KAMEN LAIDA KOUGA ("Masked Rider Cougar") is currently airing in Japan as we speak—or rather, as I write this. In time, I hope Kaizo Ningen Update can critique all this stuff—but it could take years! If you're more concerned with quantity than quality, then this is a good time to be into superheroes. There are plenty of new productions to cover, but I personally look forward to a

time when I'll be writing positive, ecstatic reviews again. -DF

ハリケーン・ポリマー

HURRICANE POLYMAR

(AKA "Hurricane Polymar Volume 1") Nippon Columbia; 1996, Tatsunoko Productions, Executive Prod.: Ippei Kari, Planned by Ippei Kari & Koki Narushima, Produced by Kazuo Kogawa & Hirotsuki Ohkura, Written by Hideki Kakinuma, Character Design by Yasuomi Umezu, Music Producer: Nobuhito Hasegawa, Art Dir.: Naboru Yoshida, Dir.: Akiyuki Shimba, English language version: Ellen



Moore & Jack Fletcher, Available from Urban Vision (<http://www.urban-vision.com>), Reviewed by Damon Foster

A remake, I assume, of the original 1970s or early 1980s superhero TV show from Tatsunoko. Since I'm way too openminded & experimental, I never really got suckered into the animation fandom (as you all know). Since I wasn't so witless as to follow a trend, I naturally was never a fan of the old POLYMAR cartoon, and I'm no expert on it. Therefore, I can't comment on the accuracy and faithfulness (same thing, spelled much differently) of this new video release from Urban Vision. Even as somebody so non-anime as myself, it didn't take long to figure out that the Polymar character was from Tatsunoko, as the character's design, and the over-all script is more than similar to their notorious, multi-variation, multi-international hybrid legacy, GATCHAMAN. This similarity, of course, is not a bad thing. Though I think Go Nagai made the best Japanese cartoons, Tatsunoko made their share of decent products as well, and if this videotape is any indication, then I suspect that the old POLYMAR series must have been pretty fun. If I try to imagine this concept [as seen in HURRICANE POLYMAR vol.1] as having that 1970s (Golden Age of Japanese Superheroes) flair, then it's not a far-fetched concept that the original POLYMAR program could have been as kick ass as the original CUTEY HONEY or GATCHAMAN.

Unfortunately though, HURRICANE

POLYMAR isn't the old classic (I assume it's "classic"—otherwise there might not be this here re-telling, right?) of yore, but yet another 1990s video. As such, it has its moments of pretentious, artsy-fartsy confusion. In this case, such distractions invade, in the form of strange cropping and brief shots which appear to be in a "letterboxed" format. These bits nearly ruined the opening battle between a female Polymar and the Catsharks, and then it happens again at the end of the tape when some mermaid (with silicone breasts; no real-life women are built and shaped like that—not that the anime fanboys in the audience have seen real naked women in person) goes underwater. These strange black frames add nothing to the story, and instead are intended for dramatic effect. I think more coherent plots, and more down-to-earth scripts would have more dramatic effect. The videobox mentions the characters' use of martial arts. But the over-the-top approach defeats the whole purpose of martial arts, and I think it would be more believable & thrilling if at least a little bit of physics & gravity was worked into the script. If more of these action scenes were like that which a real stuntman could do, then it would all make more sense, and be more enthralling. Ironically, these quick cuts and split second edits remind me too much of 1990s HK movie fights, which in turn, are too much like the way American martial arts films stage their action scenes. At least, I think so. I think a lot of things.

HURRICANE POLYMAR is an absolutely average, run-of-the-mill Japanime. The artwork is okay and the animation is tolerable. It's just another superhero series, where a good guy fights bad guys; it's that never-ending, universal theme. "Vol. 1" got off to a decent start; it introduced the characters and made its point. The action scenes are tolerable, if only the Japanese would go back to a logical, SPEED RACER format where you can tell what the hell is going on, without having to keep re-winding while saying, "Huh? What the hell?! Where did THAT come from? What the fuck are they talking about? Who? What?!" Unfortunately, HURRICANE POLYMAR sometimes goes into "complex mode," where you need to be an obsessive fanboy with your eyes glued to the TV, and being on the edge of your seat. But as standard, 1990s cartoonimation, HURRICANE POLYMAR serves its purpose and has earned its rightful place on the shelves alongside the thousands, possibly millions of virtually identical, dime-a-dozen competitors which have come out before and since. So HURRICANE POLYMAR should be a welcomed addition to the collections of the converted, but don't expect it to turn non-fans into fans, since it breaks no new grounds or offers anything particularly dynamic. I think I preferred it over all that "Tekkaman" crap I've been sitting through these last few issues, but as for current anime, releases like GOLGO 5 and WILD 7 did more for me, because the characters are more interesting, and due

to live-action variations which preceded them, I was more intrigued by the stories.

This videotape consists of two 30-minute episodes, and both are considered "Vol. 1," got it? Even though there's an older POLYMAR series, this is actually "Vol. 1" now. Whatever. So much for my math ability; I had always assumed that the number "1" was the first in the alphabet, or whatever. Anyway, shortly after the trailers for other Urban Vision releases, I guess the tape officially begins, to the accompaniment of another semi-catchy pop-rock tune (sung in Japanese; though the characters themselves are dubbed in English) sung by some chick. Speaking of chicks, the first battle pits doomed super-heroine Ryoko Nishida against the evil Catsharks, also called Plutos. Either these villains are from the planet Pluto, or they're named after Mickey Mouse's dog—I'm not sure which. Meanwhile, the sole surviving Polymar superhero is Takeshi, who works at the less-than-successful Kuruma Detective Agency, under blunderer extraordinaire Joe Kuruma. Running gags & comic relief (it all misses the mark though) includes a talking dog and the agency being located on unstable ground, on property which is condemned (one careless step and Detective Joe Kuruma falls through the floor, passed the land-fill and into the ocean—try to hold back your laughter. Hardy-har-har). After these two bumbling heroes get done being hassled by their land-lady, Takeshi finally puts on his high-tech helmet and becomes Polymar, and does battle with them Catshark henchmen from the grim empire of Goofy. I mean, Pluto! The second episode (remember though, we're still watching "Vol. 1") offers more of the same, with Polymar fighting an occasional Catshark, Joe Kuruma treading more unstable grounds, and bickering with the landlady. This second one deals with some scientist called Dr. Nielson, whom our heroes are suppose to protect, and an enemy agent (from Donald, Mini, or Daffy; whatever the villainous group is called) with gills so she can breathe underwater. ** -DF



"Hurricane Polymar"



GO GO 5

AKA: *Kyūkyū Sentai GoGoV* & *Rescue Task Force Gogo V*; Producers: Kenji Ohta (Terebi Asahi), Toei; 2000, Jun Ichigata, Koichi Yoda, Storyboard: Ryota Yamaguchi, Music: Toshiyuki Watanabe, Action Directors: Michihito Takeda & Tsuyoshi Miyazaki (both from J.A.C.), Dir.: Yoshi Orita, Cast: Ryoichiro Nishiohara as Go Red, Kenji Taniguchi as the Freeman, Atsushi Harada as Go Green (helicopter pilot), Kenji Shibata as Go Yellow (policeman), Monica Sakata Go Pink (fire-woman; Maturu), Reviewed by Damon Foster

Unlike my reviews of other 1990s Sentai programs, I actually made it a point to watch a considerable, sizable portion of this particular series. It's no secret that I finally outgrew this predictable genre; but I have, over the years, watched most of these superhero teams faithfully. I've only missed a couple, so as yet I've reviewed 95% of this never-ending series of dime-a-dozen programs. With each series averaging about 52 episodes, I certainly don't have the time to see each & every episode of any one series. So in recent years, I've normally only watched about five or six episodes from each program, and based my reviews on what little I saw. This time, however, I decided to go overboard and get a more thorough view of the series, before spouting off. I lost count of how many episodes of 1999's GOGO FIVE I've sat through, and I'm absolutely sick to death of this carbon-copy, clone of a series. Sad to say, the TV show lived up to its admittedly low standard, and I've realized that the old "view four or five episodes" approach is quite enough, since these gaudy programs offer no originality any more, and are classic examples of the phrase, "If you've seen one, you've seen 'em all". All Japanese superhero genres, be it the Kamen Riders or the Ultra Brothers, can be considered identical, but there's nothing so mindbogglingly formulaic and predictable as this here Sentai legacy.

Despite the mundane, "seen-before" attitude which is inevitable from someone

like me who grew up on the Sentai genre, I still find that I continue to have SOME respect for this Sentai crap, amazingly. I've seen this series of multi-segmented episodes (the whole GO GO FIVE series qualifies as one over-all episode) go through a lot: As a child, I watched GO-RANGERS on a weekly basis despite lack of translations, then in the 1980s the VHS revolution let me see innovative follow-ups like SUN VULCAN and DYNAMAN, and in the 1990s, I saw it's chic, U.S. underground cult-status plunder when POWER RANGERS brought it into the mainstream, albeit in hybrid form. Yes, the Sentais and I have been through a lot together, so I still get amused by each new incarnation, on occasion. It's really just for kids, and always has been, but when you consider just how incredibly lame Japanese "adult" TV is, I can still admit to being a Sentai fan with minimal embarrassment. So GO GO FIVE has it's moments; there are monsters, miniatures, guns, flashy special effects galore, and even some mild martial arts & acrobatic stunts—In short, it's got everything the other post-1984 programs have, nothing more, nothing less. It's hard not to like any series which has so much action and color, and so GO GO FIVE, despite the monotonous approach, will always be a "guilty pleasure," just like the zillions of TV shows before it. So on the whole, GOGO FIVE is neither better nor worse than any of the other post-1984 Sentai programs. Like all of them, I'm giving this series two stars ("") as a rating. The show is just average, so-so, okay at best. Some episodes of GO GO FIVE are more exciting than others, and any program with this much action and special effects has it's moments, but as is always the case in any post-BIOMAN (the last of the great Sentais, in my opinion) Sentai program, GO GO FIVE didn't do much for me.

I can think of four things which actually help to distinguish GO GO FIVE from the earlier programs that it rips off unapologetically: 1. This show ends with "Mission Complete", or "Mission incomplete" if it's a cliff-hanger episode, and this is super-imposed in English. 2. There are short glimpses of neat animated bats in each climax, it has something to do with the inevitable resurrection of each mon-





ster as he comes back to life to become gigantic. 3. GO GO FIVE might go down in history as being the only Sentai program where all five heroes are commanded & advised by a graying old man with a ponytail. 4. The whole rescue-mission aspect makes the concept more like that whole "Metal Hero" (AKA "Robo Hero") genre from the mid-1990s.

I realize that none of these observations are important, but then, there are no important things to say about GO GO FIVE. I mean really, how often have I written the same review over again? These shows are so fatally repetitious that one review covers the whole genre! Let's see: A squad, or "Sentai" of superheroes (the red one is the leader, the pink one is female and the others aren't) learn valuable lessons as they teach kids morals. The five heroes don't always get along but they really love each other and over-act to prove a point. Tense drama, however, pales compared to the problems caused by invading monsters. Once our heroes get their childish shenanigans & subplots out of the way, they battle the monsters using explosions, laser beams, swords, any type of vehicle (designed by Bandai's greedy toymaking scam-bags, no less) you can imagine, acrobatic flips and the occasional karate kick. But after the "climactic" fight, the monster miraculously

comes back to life and grows giant so that Bandai can get even richer via the toys of giant, heroic robots. That's 50% of Japanese superheroism since like 1981, and it's been regurgitated & inbred so much that the only people who don't care are the spoiled brats of Japan who outgrow this stuff by the time they determine their sexual orientation.

I think that for villainous monsters who speak, their masks should have mouths that move. Some of the monsters do move their mouths when they speak, but the mechanical movement of the jaws look so fake & chincy—considering that the programs are making a lot of money off toy sales, they should be able to correct this unacceptably cheap effect. But like I said, other monsters have completely stiff mouths and yet they too are capable of speech; and that looks even worse. This is fine if you can suspend your disbelief or can respect the old Japanese kabuki-like habit of artificial, representative dramatics, but I think if the characters speak and the budget won't allow jaws which at least move, then the design is flawed and the characters are better off without mouths.

Dr. Sekai Tatsumi (of Tatsumi Disaster Prevention Institute) isn't happy about Japan's latest demonic enemy: the space monsters of the Salma Clan. Some phe-

nomenon called "The Grand Cross" confirmed his predictions that the devil-like Salma aliens were up to no good, so the brilliant scientist turns his four sons and one daughter into the superhero squad GoGo 5, by singlehandedly creating the futuristic suits, robots, vehicles & weapons for the GoGo 5 fivesome. It's believed that this Tatsumi Family is descended from the "Machi-Bikeshi", a disaster relief squad (composed mainly of firemen) of old Tokyo (AKA Edo) during the time-period of the Shogun Tokugawa. The current siblings include Matoi Tatsumi (Go red), who's played by Ryuichi Nishio, and may be the only superhero in Japan history to have a semi-receding hairline! His followers are fireman Nagare Tatsumi (GoBlue) who's played by Kenji Tanaguchi, firewoman Matsuri Tatsumi/GoPink (Monica Sakata), helicopter pilot Shou Tatsumi/GoGreen (Atsushi Harada), and policeman Daimon Tatsumi/Go Yellow (Kenji Shibata). Naturally they wear bracelets which turn them into superheroes, but in this case, however, they must also yell "Chaku Soul" to get the full dramatic effect. Their headquarters is the "Bay Area 55 Base", where they have a huge arsenal of weapons, vehicles and the stupid, cute robot called "Analyze Robo Mint"—don't ask me why. This underwater base is also the holding area for the trains and other vehicles which, in typical post-Transformers fashion, unite to become a huge robot or two, including one named "Victory Robo"—gee, I wonder why! These robots, rayguns, swords, motorcycles, etc. all come in mighty handy, because elsewhere, the Makuyu Saiko Parakiko ("Demonic Palace: Psycho Parakiko") houses a cool-looking assortment of flamboyantly dressed villains (with Damajo Grandline, Magma Golem HellGeros, Melou Jilfiiza, Beast Baron Cobold, etc.) who have a nasty habit of unleashing monsters who, even after death, can grow giant and squash buildings. Needless to say, our heroic GoGo 5 has their work cut out for them. Interesting to note that some of the battles involve more guns than martial arts. This is a definite cultural difference between the U.S. and Japan. In America, guns (rayguns or not) are frowned upon in children's programs because guns have

caused so many deaths on school campuses and the censors like to blame the TV shows when it's clearly the faults of parents who don't have the time to raise their kids properly (so the idiots shouldn't have reproduced in the first place!). Anyway, after the gunplay, giant monsters, robots and explosions subside, the episodes end. What follows is the ending credits, portions of which show our heroes frolicking on the beach. This "cute," vomit-inducing sappiness is in sharp contrast to the ending credits of a true classic imitator like 1974's GO-RANGERS (AKA "Himitsu Sentai Gorenga"), where each ending montage is non-stop ass-kicking.

** -Damon Foster



UREME 3

(Full title: "UREME 3: JUNG GYUG 3 JAG JUN," which means: "Thunderhawk 3: Urgent Operation 3") Producer: Kim Jung-Gi, Released on video on: 5/12/88, Running Time: 90 Minutes, Starring: Shim Hyung Rei & Kim Jang-Ah, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Hot on the heels of last issue's UREME 2, it's the continuing story of Korea's most wellknown superhero movie series of the 1980s. "Ureme" ("Thunder Hawk"), however, is actually the name of the spaceship of the series; the superhero is Esperman, and he's aided by Dae Illi, a cute space chick who doesn't need an astronaut suit, and is quite at home in her tight aerobics leotard. The embarrassingly cheap special effects depicting their battles offer plenty of unintended laughs, and are accomplished by common costume accessories (Korean FX makers must have really stocked up at K-Mart, during the Halloween seasons), and out-of-place, animated inserts which help the continuity to plummet. Shim Hyung Rei's newer films (i.e. last issue's DRAGON TUKKA and the elusive YONGARY remake) are far superior to these older, inexperienced capers, but the likes of the UREME series can still entertain, if only for nostalgia value. The UREME movies are



readily available in the bootlegger market, but Shim Hyung Rei's (AKA Ray Shim) newer flicks like YONGARY (AKA "Yonggary 1998," "Yonggary 1999," "Yonggary 2000" and so on—it depends on if they ever release it) remain obscure. As I understand it, production company Zero Nine is still holding out to the highest bidder and isn't certain how to market the film (I hear they were approached by representatives of G-Fest and the Asian Fantasy Film Expo, but weren't very responsive. It was, however, screened at the Cannes Film Festival). Ray Shim's first film was PUMBA & PUMBA WHO CAME LAST YEAR, but I don't think it ever got an official English title.

As for UREME #2, it's slightly better than the first two in this Korean superhero series of movies, which almost deserve two stars each. Once more, there's the obligatory foolery which wastes the first half of the movie. Fortunately, part of that takes place on a beach, so we see one of the female regulars in a bathing suit, and a dumb scene of our equally dumb hero getting ink squirted at him, from an octopus. The creature is a mere cartoon, and looks like a reject from SQUIDLEY DIDLEY. Regardless, for better or worse, the point is that all the useless stupidity is at least amusing this time; it's not 100% boring. I only used my "Scan" button once! There's a spaceship battle at the beginning, but the first live action duel (a nice one!) doesn't occur until 45 minutes into the

film, if played at normal speed. Overall, the mattes, visuals and costumes are a slight improvement over the first two films, but what really did it for me was the return of cartoon robots. These Korean giants are just as fun as any of Japan's anime crap, and bring back fond memories of UFO DAI APOLON & YUUSHA RAIDEN, and definitely prove that the Koreans were at least somewhat inspired by Go Nagai.

It's hard to tell, but I guess the actual story starts with an evil army of space creatures on some space station. The henchwomen all wear brightly colored afros (some are green, some are red, some aren't), the likes of which I haven't seen since ROOM 222. I'm sorry, but the only people who ever should have been allowed to have afros were clowns. One female on board, and the only one to have an old Bo ("10") Derrick haircut instead of an afro, lays an egg and must send it into exile. Why? Would the monstrous commander kill the baby alien inside it, out of fear of another mouth to feed? Or would the egg end up hardboiled? I don't know, I don't speak Korean. For whatever reason, the alien husband & wife send their egg into outerspace, and it ends up on Earth. It hatches and the newly born alien befriends a Korean kid. Miraculously, this E.T.-wannabe masters fluent Korean immediately after hatching! The two tikes goof off, and in one scene, the Korean boy actually laughs at how small the alien's dick is! I'm serious, this actually happens in the movie. This is the same boy who dropped his pants earlier in the film, and he's in no position to laugh. Regardless, the two alien parents left the evil space station against orders. Meanwhile, superhero spaceman 'Esperman' (Shim Hyung Rei) has just tested a new race car called 'Turbo'. Later, Esperman battles the invading parents. If that's not rough enough for them, they get attacked by their own kin next, for having gone A.W.O.L. The father gets killed, so Esperman's giant robot takes on the giant robot of the villains. The villains all die in their battles with Esperman, Dae Illi and scientists in the Turbo car, not to mention a helicopter that looks like a shoe. UREME 3 ends with the young monster and his beautiful, far more human mother returning into space. ** -DF

GO NAGAI

by Frank Strom

なが い ごろ
永井 豪

BORN: September 6, 1945

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND: Began professional cartooning career working as assistant to legendary artist Shotaro Ishimori (KAMEN RIDER, CYBORG 009). First published as a solo artist in 1967. Groundbreaking series HARENCHI GAKKUEN ("Shameless School") published in 1968 by Shonen Jump Weekly.

As a long time Go Nagai follower/total

geek-boy, I'd been asked to write a definitive article on the man for OC. I agreed, but have stalled on it for years now. Not that I thought there shouldn't be such a piece (I've never seen a Nagai article in a western publication that even remotely knew what it was talking about), and it's not that I didn't want to do it...

But the fact is, you can't write a DEFINITIVE article about the career of Go Nagai. It's impossible. His career has spanned 30+



Go Nagai with a few friends.
Upper right: Go Nagai—
clowns around again.

years (and still going). While first and foremost a comic book artist, Nagai has had extensive work in television, movies, original video, and toys. It would be hard to catalogue his movies, even more difficult to chart his TV and video work, forget about the toys & merchandise, and believe it or not, IMPOSSIBLE to list all his comics. Close to ten years now, a friend and I have been compiling a complete bibliography of Nagai's comic books, and we're not even close yet. Several years back I found an especially obscure item (a trade-paperback english language edition of the first 200 pages of DEVILMAN). Wanting to find out the origins of that edition, I wrote to Nagai's company Dynamic Productions and inquired about obtaining a comics bibliography right from the source (there must be records, right?). Got a letter back from a Mr. Kenji Nagai (a relative no doubt) telling me there WAS NO bibliography: even THEY didn't know all the material he's turned out. Tracking down his more obscure film product is equally tough work (the earliest Nagai movies date back to the late 1960s: A short live-action film series based on HARENCHI

GAKUEN), not to mention lesser known TV product (try hunting down live-action SFX series AZTECIZER or BATTLE HAWK or even the totally forgotten robot cartoon GROUZER-XI). On the direct-to-video scene there's even a small series of live-action horror films directed by Nagai himself. And these are just examples off the top of my head. A definitive Go Nagai article? No way, no how, can't be done.

My first encounter with Go Nagai came in the late 1970s, in the form of the original line of "Shogun Warriors" toys—Japanese super-robot toys imported by Mattel, including Great Mazinger and GETTER ROBO-G's Getter-Dragon. I remember a writer in a toy magazine at the time describing the "look" of these as "neon colored samurai insects from outer space," a pretty apt description, if not a literal one. It was an art style I was enthralled by; Dynamic (you'll see that word related to Nagai more than any other) and powerful, similar qualities to those of American comics god Jack Kirby, though in no way an imitation. The cartoon shows were better than the toys, and the comic books (100% unbridled Nagai) were best of all. It's fascinating to realize how successful Nagai has been on a global level (almost every country has seen him either through comics, TV cartoons or toys—Probably making him the most seen Japanese artist worldwide, though never being acknowledged for it).

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

1968 - HARENCHI GAKUEN

Pivotal comics series, satirically skewers notions of authority and Japanese sociological ideals. Establishes anti-authority & anarchy themes that run through Nagai's entire cannon of work.

1972 - MAZINGER Z

In one fell swoop, Nagai creates an entire genre -- the giant battle-robot/superhero -- only hinted at by forerunners like GIGANTOR and JOHNNY SOKKO AND HIS FLYING ROBOT. Since MAZINGER Z, there have been numerous sequels & follow-ups by Nagai and countless imitations, rip-offs, clones, mutations & bastardizations by other artists and animation companies that just didn't GET IT. See Jeff Goodhart's review of MAZINGER Z, on page 27 of [Q.C.: The Giant Titans Issue](#).

The Giant Titans Issue.

1972 - DEVILMAN

Preceded by shorter comic series DEMON KING DANTE, this is Nagai's famous Demon series. He's done many other Demon comics since (including sequels & spin-offs), but they're all essentially remakes of DEVILMAN in one way or another. It is believed (incorrectly) that this genre is Nagai's "serious" work and that he is some sort of "horror maestro." See Paul Haberman's review of the show on page 14 of [Q.C.: The Giant Titans Issue](#).

1973 - CUTEY HONEY

The first of several "nude-cutie" superheroes from Nagai (Others being MABOROSHI PANTY, and KKKO KAMEN). One could argue for its continued influence on years and years of little girl cartoons that employed degrees of nudity, which one could speculate helped generate fanboy interest. The difference being CUTEY HONEY was wildly funny, well drawn and (typically Nagai) anarchistic in nature. For more on CUTEY HONEY, see Damon Foster's review on page 31 of [Q.C.: The Jackie Chan Issue](#).

1974 - GETTER ROBO

The TV cartoon show actually had greater impact than the comics series (drawn by frequent Nagai pinch-hitter Ken Ishikawa). Other than simply being a nifty show, GETTER ROBO introduced the "snap together" robot concept, which in itself opened major issues. Specifically, with these popular kiddie cartoons driven by the sale of tie-in toys, the demand was there for the toys to actually do what the robots did on TV (in this case, 3 jets combine into 3 different robots). Of course neither GETTER ROBO nor its sequel hero GETTER ROBO-G was designed to really work -- Just look cool. Wasn't that enough, dammit!?! For a review of this series, see page 18 of [Q.C.: The Giant Titans Issue](#).

REVIEWS:

THUNDER LYGER - PROFESSIONAL HISTORY

Video Special: Best 10 Bouts 1995, Video Pack Nippon Reviewed by Frank Strom

A pro wrestling video -- A career overview hosted by Lyger himself. The concept



seems to be Lyger picking the best matches of his career, which are shown here in edited form.

The story behind Lyger (the wrestler) and his connection with Go Nagai is an odd one. In the early 1980s, the company New Japan Pro Wrestling had enormous success with junior heavyweight stars and the multi-level marketing of Tiger Mask (originally played by Satoru Sayama and later Mitsuhiro Misawa), a wrestler based on a wrestling related comic strip & TV cartoon from the late 60s. After Satoru Sayama retired (temporarily), and Mitsuhiro Misawa left (he joined All Japan Pro Wrestling, the rivals!), New Japan Pro Wrestling's television network wanted to recreate the success of Tiger Mask with another wrestler based on a cartoon. At the time, the network's primary kiddie cartoon was a sci-fi series called LYGER (Go Nagai was hired to conceptualize & design it), so that served as the basis for a wrestler. The strange part was that LYGER (the cartoon) had nothing to do with wrestling whatsoever, and more importantly wasn't the huge hit that the TIGER MASK cartoon had been. Regardless, junior heavyweight wrestler Keiichi Yamada was given the Lyger mask & gimmick, and it took off big time; Far outshining its mediocre inspiration. Originally, junior heavyweight wrestler Keiichi Yamada was not doing well by New Japan Pro Wrestling, in previous bouts. He was initially considered too small physically to be a serious performer, and he wound up working abroad in Mexico,

Canada and England, markets where there was less of a fixation on physical size. Over his time abroad, Yamada developed into

one hell of a worker, and once back in New Japan with the Lyger gimmick, people noticed. His matches regularly stole the show on most cards and he's had a lot of classics— Most noteworthy being his long feud with masked rival Pegasus Kid (Chris Benoit), who later unmasked and was renamed Wild Pegasus. This feud was largely based on the historic Tiger Mask VS Dynamite Kid feud with Lyger standing in for Tiger Mask and Canadian flyer Benoit replacing Canadian flyer Dynamite Kid.

This special pretty well illustrates how good Lyger is and in effect how influential a worker he was (his outstanding spots/moves being replicated everywhere in & out of Japan, and even his costume, which was copied by AAA promoter Antonio Pena for his great wrestler Psychosis, and later wrestlers like Venum Black & the Space Cadets). Key matches here include a wrestler vs. martial artist bout (hard to tell if it was a legitimate contest or not, but Lyger's mask is completely destroyed in the bloody & brutal match), Lyger vs. Pegasus Kid (Pegasus loses his mask to Lyger), and two super-hot Lyger vs. Great Sasuke (vaguely based on Kamen Rider Black) epics. I believe for the now-defunct J-Crown (a championship comprised of 8 separate international Junior titles). If you're sick to death of the all-promos, all-plot, all-boredom, no-action Monday night wrestling scene, this is the video for you.

So what's this all got to do with Go Nagai? Precious little. At one point, in an effort to justify a relationship between Lyger the wrestler and LYGER the cartoon, a live-action horror film *FIST OF THUNDER* (with a screenplay credited to Nagai) was shot as a vehicle for Yamada/Lyger. Unfortunately, it was a routine Demon-type story that didn't serve anybody well, didn't manage to associate the wrestler to the cartoon, and is best forgotten. Watch *SANTO VS THE VAMPIRE WOMEN* instead. Two actual wrestling themed Nagai comics were the 70s era *AZTECAIZER* (Undead Wrestler-Superhero adventure prominently featuring wrestler-turned-senator Antonio Inoki) and 80s series *IRON MUSCLE*. (See review). ***** -Frank Strom

CHANGE! GETTER ROBO

(A.K.A. *SHIN GETTER ROBO*, *NEW GETTER ROBO*, *SHIN GETTER ROBO*, *SHIN GETTER ROBO*, etc.) 1998, Story: Go Nagai & Ken

Hishikawa, Reviewed by Frank Strom

Spurned on by a recent resurgence of interest (and following in the footsteps of the revival of *CUTEY HONEY*), here's a made-for-video cartoon series of the celebrated *GETTER ROBO* program. This is actually the second revival, but no one needs reminding of the artistic horror that was the *GETTER ROBO GO TV* series. Apparently, this video series also aired on broadcast television, which is where my copies came from. There's also an English language version of at least the first episode, though I haven't seen it. Most revivals of old classics have been disasters due to the inability of modern animation houses to match the strong art design and effective directing technique of yore. One of the only exceptions to that was the *CUTEY HONEY* video series (not to be confused with the appalling *CUTEY HONEY FLASH TV* series), which unexpectedly managed to both look like *Go Nagai* and NOT be yet another unwanted *SAILOR MOON* knockoff (see *CUTEY HONEY FLASH*). As it turns out, *CHANGE! GETTER ROBO* isn't so successful. You must understand the high potential for disaster in reviving *GETTER ROBO*; not only is this a genre that these animation people haven't done in decades (*GUNDAM*, *MACROSS* and their ilk are NOT the same genre), but it's a Nagai property, and the world doesn't need an end product that doesn't emulate his dynamic clean-lined art style. On his worse day, Nagai is loaded with energy, motion, and humor. Qualities the modern Japanese cartoon is notoriously lacking.

At first (and second) glance, *CHANGE! GETTER ROBO* is a confusing mess, bogged down by a ho-hum setting (another barren dystopian future), poorly defined characterizations and ill conceived character dynamics. There are too many characters (including the four principals from the original series), most of whom are interchangeable. The plot (from what I can make out of it) is right out of one of Nagai's Demon comics: Lead hero/pilot Ryoma has become a ruthless murderer, having killed the old science base Professor. But it turns out that the (now undead) Professor had become some evil demon/alien/monster/guy up to no good. Now it's up to crazed murderer Ryoma to pilot *Getter Robo* and stop the evil plans of the Professor! What ARE those plans? I can't



tell. Why are there like a hundred army-guy characters in this? I can't tell. Why are there no less than SEVEN Getter Robo pilots? I can't tell. Why does this feature the original Getter Robo, Getter Robo-G, and a couple new versions of Getter Robo? Well, it wouldn't be much of a toy line with only TWO robots. Duh!

While most of the art here is typical (Typically DULL) for the period, GETTER ROBO and GETTER ROBO-G's designs haven't been monkeyed with, and the three original pilot characters, while not precisely matching the original designs, at least emulate the Nagai look (bizarrely, Ryoma now bears more of a resemblance to famous Nagai character Violence Jack). Even though that's all well and good, it doesn't make up for the poor storytelling technique and animation direction (of critical importance to a VISUAL medium). In fact, the storytelling/directing is shockingly bad, probably the worst I've ever seen. Individual shots are edited together in a rapid pacing and at the same time each shot incorporates continuous camera panning: the result is one long blurred image, and you can't tell what you're looking at most of the time. I'm sorry, but that's not just bad, that's inept. The action scenes are handled the same way, thus killing any possible excitement.

Rating: 1/2*

COMICS UPDATE:

Always the most important yet least reported end of things are the comics (the bread and butter of Go Nagai). Recent development saw the bulk of Nagai's back catalogue (including virtually all the major strips) switch publishers. Since the dawn of time, the vast majority of Nagai's comics were under the umbrella of Kodansha Publishing, but in the past 3 years, MAZINGER-Z, DEVILMAN, CUTEY HONEY and the other Kodansha material has moved to the Futabasha publishing house and incorporated into several different imprints. The good news is the new publisher, in addition to offering new editions of longtime classics, is reprinting a whole host of hard to come by (and long out of print) comics. The Action Comics imprint is super-robot central, with new editions of MAZINGER-Z, GREAT MAZINGER, GETTER ROBO, GETTER ROBO-G (Which includes some new mate-

rial), STEEL JEEG, and a newly created series based on the SUPER ROBOT WARS video game (no Nagai or lookalike art, though). I can only imagine that a GRANDIZER reprint is forthcoming. More noteworthy, Action Comics has editions of out of circulation gems HENCHIN POKOIDER (1976) and HENKI-N-TAMAIDER (1978) -- Two outlandish SFX hero spoofs. Meanwhile, Media Factory (I believe a Futabasha imprint) has much rarer comedy series material, including DORORON ENMA-KUN, BURAI THE KID, MARO, CHIBIKO KAIJU YADAMON (67-68!), DONGARA SANJYUSHI (On & off 67-77), BRAVO SENSEI (68-70), ZUBABAN (71), plus new series SAMURAI JAPAN. Not to be left behind, Kodansha's KC imprint has all-new major sequel series Z-MAZINGER (at least 2 volumes so far) as well as DEVILMAN LADY (10 volumes at last count). More reprint news next time...

COMICS REVIEW:

Hyper Grapple IRON MUSCLE

Story & Art: Go Nagai & Dynamic Productions. Three volumes, approximately 300 pages each. Publisher: Kodansha. Date: Early-mid 1980s. Reviewed by Frank Strom.

Surprisingly strong quality on this 80s era series -- Nagai's art took a noticeable dip in quality in the 1980s, due mostly to his art assistants. By this point, he was using a different crew of assistants from his 70s peak, and a conscious effort was made to "modernize" Nagai's art style. The bold & confident ink lines were gone, replaced with thinner sketchy lines that a lot of the time were just plain sloppy. Even though Nagai's pencil art and storytelling methods remained powerful, the overall dynamic look suffered from the weak links. The problem continues to this day, but every now and again a confident looking product emerges.

IRON MUSCLE is one of those good efforts. It's a sci-fi/super-robot actioner where the gimmick is giant robots as pro wrestlers. In the future, wrestling is replaced with Hyper-Grappling -- 200 foot tall battle robots piloted by pro wrestlers in massive international tournaments. King Iron Pilot Hagane is killed in battle against world champ Great Odin (like the Norse god). Hagane's revenge seeking son Koichi trains



to pilot new robot Iron Muscle. The first volume mainly concerns this background story and Koichi's training, but the action kicks in with Volume 2, where Iron Muscle begins grappling in earnest and faces major competition from lady robot Fire Venus, a comedy relief robot (appears to be a revival of MAZINGER-Z's goofy "Boss Borot" character, but I'm not clear if this is a literal revival or just a lookalike character, not that it makes a difference), and nefarious evil robots Lucifer and God-Golem.

The plot, of course, is just an excuse to hang action sequences on. Fine by me. No cartoonist in the East puts action on the page like Nagai. Like the late great American comics legend Jack Kirby, Nagai's visuals just short of explode in your face. So typical of Nagai on a good day, the action scenes here are no mere set pieces, but a total non-stop barrage. Even the quiet moments between action sequences jump out at you, filled with energy and humor. From an art composition standpoint, there's no wasted space. Design-wise, the robots are good looking and truer to form than a lot of other recent forays back into this genre. The storytelling is tight and unlike so many Japanese artists (old and new), there are no wasted story pages (IE: Taking fifteen pages to do what could be done in four or five). I can't say enough about IRON MUSCLE -- It's Nagai's best 1980s piece and would have been great translated into a cartoon show or live action SFX series.

RATING: *****



FROM JAPAN:

GANGSTER

1996. Cast: Riki Takeuchi, Masayuki Imai. Reviewed by George Garvey

This film is a sequel to TOKYO MAFIA. Before I get started I just want to say that Riki Takeuchi, who cranks these yakuza films out on a regular basis is the coolest actor in the world!! Not Chow Yun Fat! Okay, you art-house types can start writing those hate letters now. This film has it all. Cool music, cool cast, good action. I hope Riki Takeuchi stays in Japan and continues to make these cool films!! Don't come to the U.S.A! Do you want to get stuck co-starring with Markey Mark?

Riki Takeuchi is mad at Masayuki Imai because he tried to kill Takeuchi and leave him for dead in TOKYO MAFIA. Takeuchi is putting together his own gang. Everyone has a questionable past: The cook, the welder, the cute gal, the sex maniac. Two things bring these people together—the promise of big money and a talent for violence. Masayuki Imai has risen high in yakuza society. Takeuchi & friends get some guns and preparations begin. Early in the film, Takeuchi kills several people in two shoot-outs. Soon the Takeuchi gang is off to a yakuza-run business for another shoot-out. Our heroes make off with a lot of cash and leave several dead bodies behind. This annoys Masayuki Imai. The welder and his family are murdered. So Takeuchi, the cook, the sex maniac and cute gal Yumi go to an abandoned building to settle things once and for all. Imai is also involved with a right wing militaristic group. It's swords vs. bullets, and in the end, bullets win. The cook and the sex maniac die. Takeuchi and Yumi survive. Imai's right wing pals croak. In the end, Takeuchi shoots Imai but doesn't kill him; he just leaves him wounded, which seems to bother Imai more than if he had

died. ***1/2—George Garvey

From America:

DEEP INSIDE ASIA CARRERA

VCA Pictures, 1997. Directed by Veronica Hart. Starring: Asia Carrera, Julie Ashtan, Mincy Rahn, Randy West, Alex Sanders, Tony Redeschi, Nick East, and T.C. Boy. Reviewed by Bret Rose.

This is a compilation tape of seven or eight sex scenes featuring one of porn's most famous current stars, Asia Carrera. Nothing too special, but the interview segments between the sex scenes are worth a look. Carrera, who has played Carnegie Hall



and taught college in Japan, is a very attractive and intelligent (she's a mathematical genius, reportedly) young woman, and she comes across more natural than most of the bubble-headed blonde bimbos who dominate these films. For one, she actually seems to enjoy herself throughout her movies, rare in this age of "actresses" gritting their teeth while growling "Oh, yeah, baby!" And as a plus, she has proven that she can actually act, when need be. She really should be in more mainstream stuff.

These aren't her best scenes, but they are

interesting, at least more so than the usual fare. There's even a lesbian scene where she's dressed up as a man (mustache and all). You could do better, but compared to most of the hand-exercise videos out there, you could do a lot worse. **

From Italy:

THREE SUPERMEN IN SANTA DOMINGO

(German title: "Crashboys") Barbatosa Srl Productions; 1986. Distributors: Bolmar (Rome). Directed by Italo Martinenghi. Screenplay: Italo Martinenghi, Adalberto Albertini & Antonio C. Corti. Dir. of Photography: Pier Giorgio Albertini. Cast: Daniel Stryphen, Sal Barges, Steven Martin, Gena Cox, Jesse Rappahel, Juan Lopez Grisolia, Ann Silvia Grullian, Margueto Gomez.

After enjoying the earlier films in this Italian superhero/martial arts series, this sad climax is disappointing—to say the least. THREE SUPERMEN IN SANTA DOMINGO is perhaps the slowest paced, and talkiest in the "Three Fantastic Supermen" film series. Making it worse, the only print I could lay my greedy paws on was from Germany! So it's Italians playing Americans in South America, and speaking German! But even if I found an English version of this stupid farce, it wouldn't matter, for THREE SUPERMEN IN SANTA DOMINGO sucks in any language. There's a drastic drop in quality, and it's hard to believe this awful flick is from the same film series as 1967's THE THREE FANTASTIC SUPERMEN (see *O.C.: The Bepitilian Issue*), THREE SUPERMEN IN THE JUNGLE (see *O.C. #29: The Final Chinese Vampire Issue*), THREE SUPERMEN IN TOKYO (see 1997's *O.C. #28: Chow Yun Fat & Monkey King*), and of course, THREE SUPERMEN AGAINST THE ORIENT (see *O.C.: The Jackie Chan Issue*). Of all those films, I think the first one is the best. The last one, this here THREE SUPERMEN IN SANTA DOMINGO, is definitely the worst, so it's easy to see that the

movie series [which showed so much promise] was on a downhill ride from the start. I think there were eight films total, the more elusive ones being: *THREE SUPERMEN IN THE OLD WEST* (Spanish title: "Tres Supermen En El Oeste"), *THREE SUPERMEN IN ISTANBUL*, and *THREE SUPERMEN VS. THE GODFATHER* (AKA: "Tres Supermen Contre El Padrino").

In the old days, the Three Fantastic Supermen were meeting scantily clad tribes of babes and Russian villains on jungle safaris, learning kung fu in Hong Kong from Lo Jie, or catching bad guys in Tokyo. But in 1986, they're wasting time stealing a watch from FBI agent Bradford Scott (Daniel Stephen), romancing women, and engaging in boring hijinks on a ship and at a firing range. It's so obvious that the Italian movie industry took a nose-dive since the 1960s, and trying to watch this low budget, rushed caper is quite painful—especially if you remember the old classics like I do. The best shots are stock-footage, it's flashbacks from the older films, including a couple decent fights from *THREE SUPERMEN IN TOKYO*, which until now, I didn't consider that hot.

Former acrobat Salvatore Borgese seems to reprise the semi-speechless character he played in many of the previous films, because he again pantomimes (and his antics do offer a chuckle or two) and makes physical gestures; however, their stupid krauts in Deutschland just didn't get it, and seem to have dubbed him in German regardless! He's graying, but still appears to be in healthy shape for his age and doesn't look too much older than he did in the 1960s and 1970s films. He doesn't do any of his youthful acrobatics though, of course! There are two younger guys (Daniel Stephen & Steven Martin) to fill out the trio, but their fighting skills & acrobatic ability is pretty basic. They lack the limberness & skill of Tony Kendall & Nick Jordan, and the charisma of Brad Harris.

Their karate fights do manage to amuse (as opposed to the karate fights from the first film, which excite) though. It's obvious, however, that the budget didn't include a decent choreographer. They're staged rather badly, with poor continuity, and are quite crude. The high jumps rely less on trampolines (the staple of *THE THREE FANTASTIC SUPERMEN*), and count on the same old reversed-film editing that the HK kung fu makers were using in the 1970s. As for the mid-air somersaults, even those are in-

FEARLESS NADIA: Stunt Queen of India

by Linda Arroyo



"Fearless Nadia," the stunt queen, in *HUNTERWALL* (GIRL WITH THE WHIP)

A few years ago, watching India's *LIBERTY PUBLIC DEMAND* (reviewed in *O.C.: The Shaolin Temple Issue*), I caught a glimpse of an old B&W movie clip of what appeared to be a pale-skinned blonde Hindi woman whacking a few dark-skinned Hindustanis (Indians) on a moving locomotive. With no mention of the film or its actress, I was determined to find out who this woman was that leaped from one train cart to the next, and wrestled a gang of thugs. Thanks to Sumita S. Chakravarty's book *Indian Popular Cinema* (1993), I discovered that the blonde Bollywood heroine was "Fearless Nadia," India's prominent stunt queen.

Back in the 1930s, stunt films were highly revered alongside mythological, historical and social drama masailas (movies). Though Talkies were not established until 1935, these early film genres inspired a new generation in the 1960s (particularly stunt films, which the industry had discontinued making with the fall-out of WWII). With two familiar names in mind, Shammi Kapoor and Amitabh Bachan, these actors (AKA stunt performers) revived the stunt film genre, honoring the works of "Fearless Nadia." Greco-Welsh, "Fearless Nadia" was a renowned stunt woman remembered for her characterization of male like action & disguise. With a Mamie Van Doren physique, the Bombay actress performed such amazing stunts like a reversal jump from ground to balcony that earned her the title "Fearless Nadia, Stunt Queen." In fact, 20's American stuntwoman Ruth Roland earned a similar role.

Though Nadia was mostly known for her train stunts (as was Ruth Roland) in *TOOFAN MAIL* (1932), *MISS FRONTIER MAIL* (1936), *HURRICANE NANSA* (1937), *TOOFAN EXPRESS* (1938), *FLYING RANEE* (1939), *DUNJAB MAIL* (1939), *HURRICANE SPECIAL* (1939) and *SON OF TOOFAN MAIL* (1947), she spiced up the colonially ruled country with tight costumes, exposing her shapely figure, while fighting & wrestling evil-doers like in *HUNTERWALL* (GIRL WITH THE WHIP). Sadly, photos of this extraordinary actress are difficult to find.

Way ahead of her time (even today's Bombay actresses, who perform some of their own stunts, can't top her feats), Fearless Nadia, according to action-director Girish Karnad, represented "courage, strength and Idealism" to a country under colonial rule. -Linda Arroyo

effective to anybody who remembers Nick Jordan's stunning flights in the first film. There's a fist-fight on a ship, where the Three Not-So-Fantastic Supermen are trying to keep a trio of lovely ladies from being kidnapped by several thugs. The battle attempts to have the same well-staged, beautifully executed gymnastics we've come to expect from the film series, but during this whole ship battle, it's so obvious that they're all falling on their asses, and that the camera is carefully (hah!) positioned so that the inevitable landing on the pad is out of the shot. A far cry from seeing the original Three Supermen do a mid-air flip and land on their feet (on hard ground) all in one take.

The setting is some place called Santa Domingo. FBI agent Bradford Scott has gone there, accompanied by the two other bumbling Supermen for some mission. They have a couple tolerable spats with the local villains, there are a few nice looking ladies (i.e. the stunning Gena Gas) in provocative clothing, and Sal Borgese is still a witty & energetic guy, but otherwise this is a routine caper which is useless if you don't speak German. I'll be outrageously kind by giving it one whole star (*), because it might be worth a star if ever I find an English dubbing and can understand what these idiots are talking about. * -DF

From India:

REKHA O REKHA

Running Time: 150 Minutes, Starring: Rekha and Amitabh Bachchan, Reviewed by Joe Arroyo

REKHA O REKHA is a compilation [from older films] of the sizzling South Indian sex-bomb's early films & songs. Segmented into ballads, dance songs and acting abilities, REKHA O REKHA is fun to watch and listen to.

A sex-bomb of the 1970s, Rekha, meant "sex" to Indian audiences; very much like Bridgett Bardot in her time. Albeit I do fancy Bardot, Rekha is in a class of her own. Featured in REKHA O REKHA are all of her movies with then leading man [on and off stage] Amitabh (The Big B) Bachchan. Rekha is one of the most respected actresses in Bollywood.

Scenes and music from DHARMATMA, GHAAAR and NAGIN spectacularly display a young Rekha melting the hearts of gods. Get this special tape, cretins...throw away all those lame Amy Yip pics and Asian trash

films and learn something! *** -Joe Arroyo
From Korea:

CHUN NYUN HWAN SAENG

("Reborn a Thousand Years Later") Dir.: Nam Ki Nam, 1996, Released: 1998, Reviewed by Davron Foster

A Korean ghost movie, about a Korean ghost no less, and rather typical of other Asian films about ghostly, sultry females who are attractive yet scary, and have eerie laughs during the night. Stories like this aren't uncommon in Japan and Hong Kong cinema, so CHUN NYUN HWAN SAENG offers very little originality. There were also many other low budget Korean horror films in the 1970s and 1980s, but I've not seen them. So CHUN NYUN HWAN SAENG reminds me of half ass watchable HK movies of the 1980s, like ESCAPE FROM CORAL COVE and ABRACADABRA, but it's not as interesting. As is always the case with Korean films, there's no English translation whatsoever, and since the film is mostly talking, it's a complete waste of time to anybody who's Korean-language impaired. That's the problem with Korean movies; these guys have no desire to reach a wider audience, unless of course Korean movie goes all gain weight.

This movie is the work of Nam Ki Nam, sometimes called the Ed Wood of Korea. How he got his break in movies is interesting. In 1970's Korea, there was supposedly some pride-related rule that movie-marketing companies must first make 5 local movies (to keep people employed in Korea's own movie industry) before they could start to import foreign movies. So Nam Ki Nam started making low-budget, cheesy movies fast. Producers began to call for him when December was on the way, since Xmas vacation is probably the busiest season for Korean theaters. He could make 2-3 movies at once, within a week!!! Nam Ki Nam also influenced Shim Hyung Rei (AKA Ray Shim) who is the owner of Zero-Nine Productions, and he's certainly no stranger to O.C. readers. In fact, Nam Ki Nam also made some early "Young Gu" (a famous comedic character, rather a Korean Lou Costello) type movies, and it became a stereotype of Korean b-movies. In their time, these childish capers were quite successful, and one of the biggest hits was YOUNG-GU AND TTANGCHILI (AKA "Young Gu and Deng Chir"), over 2 million people saw that movie in theaters. But the first time Ray Shim & Nam Ki Nam worked together was

on a movie which roughly translates (and badly!) into English as PUMBA & PUMBA WHO CAME LAST YEAR! It was also Ray Shim's first film.

CHUN NYUN HWAN SAENG, for what it's worth, isn't actually a bad movie despite ample doses of absolute boredom. The vengeful ghost chick is presented well, and there's some decently creepy atmosphere once or twice. The emphasis is definitely more on drama than special effects, as this pretty yet lethal spirit goes around killing the men who jilted her when she was alive. There's some interesting chemistry between the male "villains" (it's hard to tell who's good and who's bad in this one), all of which are corrupt businessmen. Even the main characters are shown to be culprits, so that we don't feel sorry for them when the lady apparition off's them, one-by-one. For example, in one scene, a guy let's his boss (a handicapped elder in a wheelchair) drown in a creek while fishing, perhaps to speed up the guy's own promotion as a replacement. So in its own slow-paced way, the film has decent character development and emotional depth—it's just too bad only a small population of mankind is permitted to understand it. As a horror talkie, it succeeds; it's about average and deserves two stars. But that's only if your name is Kim or Hun, you work in California, practice tae kwon do, and hang out in stores where everybody is rude to non-Koreans. Since this doesn't apply to me, and most of you people, then we'll subtract a star. If only this soap opera had dubbing or subtitles, then it would merit a whopping two stars (**).

On the whole, it's an average horror drama. Being Korean, it could almost be considered cheap by our standards, but since the continuity and production values suffice, it's not too ambitious for it's own good. The special effects are limited; they're neither special nor effective. The ghost's makeup amounts to little more than white lipstick (as though she doesn't want her mouth to get sunburned), and there's some blood in the death scenes, but it's not gratuitous enough to be considered "gory"—I've seen more bloodshed on STAR TREK. In one scene, her hands sprout claws, which reminded me of a similar effect in THE HOWLING. As for animated visuals, there are a couple super-imposed "lightning" effects; like in one scene the villainess (heroine? It's hard to tell, since this ghost has a cause) shoots beams up to destroy an office building. The destroyed building is

From Japan:

CHO NYU DENSETSU Q KONO CHICHI O KURAE - MORIKAWA MARIKO

(*"The Legend of Super Big Tits, Q: Eat These Tits—Mariko Morikawa"*) An Athena Production, Cast: Mariko Morikawa, Kimiya Takahashi, Ryuichi Soita, Hiramatsu Kazuko. Reviewed by Damon Foster

The delightfully colorful title is the best thing about this shot-on-video pornography. This stupid adult video actually has no official English title, but when we took the Japanese title and translated it, the above title is basically what we came up with. It's typically nonsensical, especially the English "Q" which appears there; I have no idea what it's there for. It doesn't really matter though, because this video is no good, it's even worse than that Miki Sawaguchi videotape I reviewed about a year ago. Amazingly, I rated that videotape (101 CM: J-CUP) a whopping three and a half stars! Looking back on it, I think that had to have been a typing error on my part! I think it only deserves two stars, and it's better than this here CHO NYU DENSETSU Q KONO CHICHI O KURAE - MORIKAWA MARIKO, which gets the generous rating of a single star.

Mariko Morikawa may be considered too "pudgy" for most men's taste, but I think she's an intense beauty. Sure, she's got some meat on her, but it's in all the right places. She's definitely not built like some average anorexic model or porn star. With a physique like that, it's amazing we don't see more shots for tit fetish addicts like myself. There is a brief scene of her jogging (and that sweat-shirt is all over the place!), a silly shot where she smashes a tomato between her tits, and she even lies bare-chested on a xerox machine to make a copy of her mammoth mammaries. I did drop my jaw during a couple candid interviews where she's in tight, cleavage enhancing blouses, but the remainder of CHO NYU DENSETSU Q: KONO CHICHI O KURAE MORIKAWA MARIKO is just typical pornographic nonsense, with nudity galore—the type of thing any porn actress can do. So you would think that the porno fans (AKA hard-up losers) would love this. But the really explicit stuff, like penetrations and blowjobs, is censored. So I really don't know what target audience this lame waste of videotape is intended for. * -Damon Foster



stock-footage from an actual demolishing through.

This story is intended for adults. There are bedroom scenes, and a tacky lovemaking scene punctuated by the most nauseating saxophone solo since the ending theme song of ONE DAY AT A TIME. There's also a brief shower scene. There are a couple very brief scenes of some chick's breasts (and she's flatter than a bottle of Diet Coke opened a hundred years ago last Tuesday). As a grown-up movie, the characters are more complex than those of Shim Hyung Rei's kiddie capers (but still, I think his movies are the best Korea has to offer), so it's impossible to understand every scene. But like I said, a lady returns from the grave, as her skeleton works its way up from decomposed body to living woman, in special effects scenes using the "fade" technique, barely equivalent to the Universal werewolf & Dracula movies of the 1940s. The course of this talker has all these Korean business-man talking to each other, and every now and then, the ghost lady kills them. There's a flashback which explains that four men (or so) killed her, presumably because she had an affair with some guy and they needed her to "hush up." And so this Korean variation of GHOST STORY (the one with Fred Astaire) meanders on with nightmare scenes, a little OMEN rip-off music, and other clichés until the end, at some Buddhist funeral for one of the men she killed. But his ghost arises from the coffin, allowing for an unpredicted change of pace. His ghost enters the body of some man, who engages in a really lame martial arts duel with the ghostly vixen! They even fire a little bit of electricity at each other. This silly climax is out-of-place in an otherwise pretty slow-paced film. Anyway, she kills her rival, but then some little girl throws a crucifix at her. This cross stabs the ghost lady in the chest, and she, though already dead, seems to uh, well, die. It makes me wonder; what happens to the undead that's been killed? Is it now the undead? Will the ghost's spirit come back to haunt us? Or will the ghost's spirit come back to haunt regular spirits, and terrorize them? Will these regular spirits have nightmares? Will they have to hire the ghost of an exorcist to save them? * -DF

From Japan:

ZERO WOMAN

1995, Directed by person, Produced by people, Cast: Naoko

Iijima, Reviewed by George Garvey

This is the first in this popular action film series. It's now up to part ten. But this is the first. This is the original. This is ZERO WOMAN! I liked ZERO WOMAN a lot! If you like girls with guns, weirdness, beatings, knives, cool music, paranoia, and corrupt, two-faced individuals, then this film is for you!!!

Cutie pie Naoko Iijima plays "Zero Woman" in this one. She is a member of a secret police unit that basically assassinates criminals who are beyond the law. Action is short, brutal and to the point! No long, drawn out H.K. blast-a-thons. If someone needs to be shot, they get shot. And Zero Woman shoots several people. Lots of weirdness in the film. In one scene, Zero Woman shoots someone who looks like her, only to find she's wearing a mask.

A billionaire industrialist and his pervers daughter are causing a lot of problems, mainly murder. They are both accomplished hypocrites. They have a lot of people fooled with their "community involvement" crap! They're always helping orphans. Zero Woman isn't fooled! The more she digs, the worse it gets. Everyone is corrupt, including her boss. Zero Woman is captured twice and escapes both times, killing her enemies. At one point (while back at her apartment) she starts having flashbacks while dancing to noise music. Very weird, but very cool! In the end, Zero Woman kidnaps pervers daughter and takes her to a television station where her industrialist father is on one of those "This Week in Business" shows. The daughter is used as a decoy so Zero Woman can kidnap Mr. Industrialist Billionaire. She takes him to an abandoned factory and ties him up. Before she can get the truth out of him, Zero Woman's boss shoots Mr. Billionaire to death. Zero Woman is very unhappy! But her boss isn't worried. He has a smug "What are you gonna' do? Quit and work at McDonalds?" look on his face. ***1/2 - George Garvey

From the Philippines:

THE BEAST OF THE YELLOW NIGHT

Presented by Four Associates Ltd., 1970, Produced by John Ashley & Eddie Romero, Written & Directed by Eddie Romero, Edited by Ben Barcelon, Cinematography: Justo Paulino, Original Score: Nestor Rabiles, Starring: John Ashley, Mary Wilton, Eddie Garcia, Leopoldo Salcedo, Ren Meraldo, Vic Diaz, Andreas Centeno, Reviewed by Damon Foster

John Ashley is (1934-1997) at it again,

returned from the dead to stalk human prey...



making another American horror movie—though shooting it in the Philippines to cut costs; utilizing Filipino actors, directors, writers, and (gasp!) probably even caterers! Yuck, you think maybe after a hard day's filming John Ashley, Eddie Romero & the cast enjoyed a big steaming bowl of ox-tail soup or some such ghastly concoction?! Regardless, this is not a bad movie, in fact it's more well made than MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND (reviewed in Q.C.: The Bruce Lee Issue), a previous John Ashley/Eddie Romero collaboration.

Where THE BEAST OF THE YELLOW NIGHT succeeds is in its characters & story, because Filipino director Eddie Romero knows (or knew, past tense—I think he's six feet under, as we speak) what he's doing—at least, I think so. The script is consistently interesting, the talkiness (in English, there's only a minute's worth of Tagalog) only had me doze off once or twice. But there's a catch, a reason for its ability to intrigue: Confusion! The approach baffles, and it kept me guessing, speculating! The movie exercises the brain cells, but I don't know that Eddie Romero had this in mind. So throughout the feature-length drama, a certain question came to mind. The question is coming up. But it's become clear to me that some of you don't like my usage of obscene words, so those of you who are squeamish [about mere text on paper] shouldn't read the following THE BEAST OF THE YELLOW NIGHT-inspired question: "What the fuck is going

on?" Now, I don't wanna leave my uptight, prissy audience in the dark yet they have not read the underlined question which so accurately conveyed my reaction to the story. So I hereby present another version of the question, one which is cleaner: "What hell is going on?" If even that is too vulgar for you, here's an even more wholesome way of phrasing it: "What the gosh-darn heck is going on?" **WARNING:** This Paragraph Featured Language which was Adult in Nature, and Should not Have been Viewed by Small Children.

So anyway, the darn/dang point I was trying to make was that, well, golly willickers; the story of *THE BEAST OF THE YELLOW NIGHT* isn't very clear. Darn it! One topic which is different, and is not open to alternate speculation & interpretation is the special effects, which are quite clear cut: A single rubber mask! That's it! So it doesn't have "special effects"; it has "special effect" (singular)! Some guy clomping around in the Philippines wearing what appears to be werewolf hands & face. His attacks on people include an occasional neck bite, but most of the time, he's swinging his arms around to scratch & punch his victims, allowing for hastily painted bloodshed. On the whole though, *THE BEAST OF THE YELLOW NIGHT* is typical of low budget American horror movies from the 1960s & 1970s. The production values also aren't much better than what they still have in current Filipino cheapies.

The gosh-darn video-box explained things about the script which the movie itself did not: "A group of Satanists save a man from death. Unfortunately, there's a catch—he must become their disciple and human guinea-pig in return," or words to that effect. They also called it a "take on the Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde story," and also "Robert Louis Stevenson served up Filipino horror style." Whatever. My take on this is that some Filipino witch doctor (who looked ridiculous when he tried squeezing his gut into that skimpy Polynesian tribal get-up) experiments with demonic possession & reincarnation, and turns an American businessman (John Ashley) into a brown-skinned, fanged killer. The island warlock has damned him to heck! In the day time, the guy has a high position job and a pretty blond wife, but when he does something (i.e. expressing love or walking too close to a Catholic Church) his demonic master re-

grets, he goes a slaughtering, as the box says: "Returned from the dead to stalk human prey!" Most of the movie is talky & dramatic, as John Ashley romances his wife (allowing for very brief nudity). Gee-wiz, there are Filipino cops who get decently sized roles as they try and find out how to locate the rampaging monster (who only makes a few brief appearances). To pad the story out, the creature befriends a blind man; a blatant steal from *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*. Gee willickers! Anyway, the one thing Ashley wants is death; for his damned soul to rest in peace. Since the Filipino "devil" wants him to remain alive for eternity, death isn't possible; he's immune to bullets and car wrecks. But right before the movie's dang-jeez end, John Ashley simply prays to a dying friend, which releases the curse. So then, when a supporting character (a Filipino police man) shoots him, he finally dies. ** -Damon Foster

From Japan:

RING

1998, Producer: Hideo Nakata, Based on the novel "Ring" and "Rasen" ("Spiral") by Koji Suzuki, Produced by Rasan Productions, Screenplay: Hiroshi Takahashi, Cast: Nanako Matsushima, Hiroyuki Sanada, Miki Nakatani, Yoichi Numata, Naoko Takeuchi, Hitomi Sato, & Yutaka Matsushige, Reviewed by John Emma

This review is based on two films (it took two fuckin' films for me to figure it all out, but it was worth it) and a TV adaptation. The earlier film was a TV movie, and more faithful than the book, and I'll primarily follow that plotline. All versions are excellent though, and I hear both are available in the states; there will be some surprises in store for viewers. It's a real pleasure to review this film because it represents what the newest talent is doing here in Japan, both authors and film producers. It copies, in a sense, what some of America's authors like Steven King and Dean Koonts have done, but still retains a uniquely Japanese flavor. I'd like to see these movies, and the series of books they're based on, released in English versions. And in Japan these books and films have become a major franchise recently, so it's just possible it might happen. Here's a news flash: A new TV mini series based on the *RING* stories is now ongoing, with a 3.5 Neilsen rating, whatever-the-hell that means.

I guess this could be best described as a mystery with psychic overtones. It has lots

of atmosphere and attitude. The film begins with a newspaper reporter named Asakawa investigating the deaths of a number of teenagers. One of them was apparently a relative. In speaking to friends of the dead teens, he gets a strange story: They all died after watching a "cursed" video. Thinking this would make an interesting sidebar story, he sets out to find and view this video. His search leads him to a cabin in the mountains of south Hokkaido. There, on a suitably stormy night, he views the video, a strange mish-mash of images ending with these words, "If you've watched this video you will be dead in 7 days." Asakawa becomes convinced the warning is true (I don't know why) and sets out to solve its mysteries, and coincidentally save his own skin. He enlists the aid of an old friend, a professor Ryuji Takayama. Together they set out to decipher the video and solve its mystery. The search takes them back around 30 years in time. They find the video is actually a psychic message from a woman named Satako. She was a psychic who "performed" on stage and disappeared many years ago. Their research finally reveals that she was raped and murdered by her father, and that she was a hermaphrodite! The father, after revealing this information to Asakawa and Takayama kills himself in shame.

In a frenzied scene the two investigators discover she was dropped into a well on the sight of the cabin the dead teens had rented to view the video after her rape and murder. Racing to the scene they recover her body from the well, just before the week's deadline ends. Asakawa survives and the curse seems at an end with a proper burial and peace for her spirit. But, in a clichéd but clever trick ending, the professor dies a few days later. Asakawa then, finally, puts it all together. The kids he earlier had interviewed had told him the only way to survive was to pass on the video to someone else, after first copying it yourself. This he had unthinkingly done when enlisting Takayama's help. It also seems to explain the film's title, *RING*, as an endless circle of either death or the betrayal of someone else.

The version of the film I've just described is the earlier, more faithful to the book, version. The '98 movie version makes a few changes, but the plot is essentially the same. I give the first version 5 stars, and the new one 4-1/2. See them both if you can. And good news, *RING II* is released, and reviews say it's excellent. ****1/2 -John Emma



DNA SIGHTS 999.9

Urban Vision: 1999, Original Story: Leiji Matsumoto, Executive Producer: Yoshitaka Hago, Prod.: Masao Maruyama, Dir.: Masayuki Kajino, Written by Tatsuhiko Uashita, Character Design: Marisuke Eguchi, Reviewed by Damon Foster

And so, I begin this issue's obligatory "Terror Yaki!" (section on Japan's sci-fi, horror and monsters) column with anime. Last issue, my tolerance for Japanese cartoons really petered out as I tried sitting through the last

(hopefully!) of the TEKKAMAN BLADE tapes. Because of the unpleasant aftertaste, I wasn't looking forward to this anime tape, and put off writing this review. But I made it through DNA SIGHTS 999.9 in just two sittings, and was pleasantly surprised. It's no surprise to see Leiji Matsumoto's name in the credits, as this drama is much like his STAR BLAZERS and CAPTAIN HARLOCK. TV shows I used to watch faithfully as a child, and seemed to enjoy them enough to tune in regularly. I won't deny that Leiji Matsumoto knows how to write interesting stories, and come up with halfway decent characters. However, my days as an anime fan were numbered; it all changed due to a fateful event at some small scale, "Japanese Fantasy" type convention I attended in the late 1970s. The VCR was showing stuff like GHIDRAH THE THREE HEADED MONSTER and ULTRAMAN, with half-ass attention from the audience. Then when STAR BLAZERS came on, suddenly every fat dork, homo & trendy four-eyed geek in the room flocked around the TV. It was a fateful moment which forever altered the subject matter within OC. Up until that point, I think I liked cartoons almost as much as live-action, but when the "Japanimation" fad exploded, I stuck to the less popular (AKA live action) Japanese TV shows. I have therefore not watched any of that SPACE CRUISER YAMATO crap in like 20 years, and have also avoided the likes of BLUE NOAH and GALAXY EXPRESS 999.

Yet here I am watching another of these animated sci-fi dramas for the first time in nearly two decades, and since I've mellowed out (not as hostile) in my old age, I

was pleasantly surprised. If you're the type who insists on a steady diet of Leiji Matsumoto's "space operas," then your video collection is incomplete if you don't have this here tape. The story is interesting, and the characters are well-defined. There! I said nice things about it. Now maybe Urban Vision will use my quotes for liner notes somewhere! In case that's not good enough, here are some other liner notes from me, in regards to this tape! It would be so cool to see these lines in an ad, a catalogue, or perhaps a videotape box itself. Here goes:

"Fuckin aye, Urban Vision! Way to go!" - Damon Foster, ORIENTAL CINEMA

"Holy shit! The chicks in DNA SIGHTS 999.9 sure are drawn hot! That villainous babe is awesome; why, if I had a daughter that looked like her, I'd uh, well, I'd be in jail!" - Damon Foster, ORIENTAL CINEMA

"Them animated people sure do like to talk a lot! But at least they do it with feeling! Stunning performances by all involved; they kick ass!" - Damon Foster, ORIENTAL CINEMA

But seriously, let me get to the plot of this slightly better-than-average video, which on the box it's said to be a "action packed compilation." Compilation perhaps, but I think this is a misuse of the words "action packed." Leachie Matsumoto, or whatever the hell his name is, isn't known for action-anime; that's more Go Nagai's bag, baby. Matsumoto specializes in animated soap operas about people and spaceships. In this case, the cartoon guy in question is called Tetsuro Daiba, who looks like Derrick Wildstar with a big nose. Daiba has some special power (brought on by radiation from a meteor shower), as does some gal who looks exactly like Nova (from STAR BLAZERS), and some telepathic cat. Anyway, some blonde lady from another planet comes to Earth delivering a prophecy, which won't surprise anybody who sat through the first two seasons of STAR BLAZERS. Another character is Photon, an evil alien chick who leads an army of "traitors"; spaceships & henchmen who like firing guns and missiles. There's also a large group of subterranean slime-guys who reminded me of the creatures in Toho's THE H-MAN. The setting is the year 2024, and the story deals largely with our three heroes (the boy, the girl & the cat) teaming up, and then getting on a rocket at the climax. They get



GAMERA STRIKES BACK



into this spaceship, and just as they're blasting off, they briefly meet Captain Harlock himself, remember him?! He's holding up well after all these years, and doesn't look any older than he did 20 years ago. Regardless, this cameo of spaceships (both Harlock's Arcadia and Space Cruiser Yamato make appearances) is pretty pointless, and all too similar to the Yamato's (AKA "Argo," in America) hasty appearance in Daiji's god-awful GAMERA, SUPER MONSTER. So anyway, DNA SIGHTS 999.9 ends with our heroes setting off for outer space, so I imagine I've been spared the boring parts. You'll notice that I'm giving this tape three stars. That's only because I'm comparing it to other cartoons. If I were comparing it to



something I really love, like KAMEN RIDER, then this tape wouldn't get a single star. But for what it is, DNA SIGHTS 999.9 manages to suffice. *** -DF

GAMERA STRIKES BACK

ガメラ対バルゴン

(AKA "Gamera Tai Barugon," Gamera vs. Barugon," "War of the Monsters") Daiji, 1966. Released by Majestic Home Video. Dir. Shigeo Iwano. Written by Nizo Takahashi. Produced by Masaichi Nagata. Starring: Kojiro Hongo, Kyoko Endo, Akira Natsuki, Koji Fujiyama, Yuza Hayakawa, Ichiro Sugai. Reviewed by: Madison Carter.

What? Don't remember this Daiji mas-

terpiece? Well, you will, as it's nothing more than a disguised GAMERA VS. BARUGON (aka GAMERA TAI BARUGON, WAR OF THE MONSTERS). See, back in the 80's, a very low-life film company called Film Ventures took a bunch of films, as well as edited some tv shows into films, and added new credit sequences and titles, and released them upon an unsuspecting video and television viewing audience, quite often illegally. They are probably most famous for the credit sequences; Without fail, every credit sequence they added featured action from a COMPLETELY DIFFERENT MOVIE! And this piece of plastic is no different. You know something's wrong when you pop in a Gamera tape, and the first thing you see is

slo-mo shots of Godzilla and Ghidorah tearing up Tokyo.

Beyond that, it appears to be a fairly intact version of WAR OF THE MONSTERS, the pre-Sandy King version (I think, as I have neither of the other versions handy to compare). The print they used is probably the grainiest of any mass-released tape I have ever seen. Pretty bad. I found this in a chain-store years ago, rented it and copied it, not knowing how obscure it was. When I went back to see if I could buy it, it was gone. Oh, well. A definite obscurity in the realm of Gamera films. **** - Madison Carter

G.I. SAMURAI

(Original Japanese title: "Time Slip") Ton, Released by: Oriental Extremes Video (in Association with Arena Home Video; 1997, Fights Staged by Sonny Chiba, Directed by Kato Saito, Starring: Sonny Chiba, Tsukiko Watabe, Rinto Ryū, Jun Eto, Akira Matsuhira, Trashed Mercilessly by Damon Foster

One of the worst Japanese sci-fi movies I've ever sat through! I knew this early 1980s fiasco would be lame since I first read about it back around 1982. So I was in no particular hurry to see it. I had seen Japanese cinema decline in the 1980s, and knew damn well I wasn't missing a thing. But there it was, on the video shelf, and with me running out of Japanese science fiction to critique, I knew that my renting this piece of crap was inevitable. So I grabbed the pre-record to rent the damn thing, and already

I found something stupid that I can scoff at, and I hadn't even gotten the lousy video home to watch it yet! On the back of the tape is an advertisement for the magazine *Eastern Heroes*. I've no problem with this; they advertized and I hope they get lotsa' response and make a lot of money. More power to them. But the arrogant prick who wrote "the world's number one magazine on Asian cinema" definitely has difficulty in counting. I tend to take "number one" literally—so it would depend on who pre-dates who. Greg Shoemaker's *Japanese Fantasy Film Journal* pre-dates all the rest, and deserves to be called "number one." I'm curious to know just how the hell they came to the irresponsible conclusion that they're "number one," when O.C. pre-dates them by at least ten years. My only other complaint about the box cover is that for some reason, the idiots included a photo of the guy from ZIPANG. Whether or not the same actor is in both films I don't know, but this made the video box quite misleading.

Regardless, as for the movie itself, G.I. SAMURAI had such potential. The idea of a modern platoon going back in time to deal with samurais was a good one. I expected to see Sonny/Shinichi Chiba using modern karate tactics against their traditional judo & kendo. It seemed really cool. But other than some swordplay, there's no martial arts in this movie. Most of the action is guns and tanks, it's really just a war movie, except that the two armies (modern vs. not-so-modern) use different types of weapons.

Little is explained about the "time slip" (usually called a timeWARP in other sci-fi movies) which for no reason at all, sends a group of 20th century soldiers back to the feudal period. At first the squad befriends a warlord, and they use their guns & tanks to help him defeat his rivals. Later, a couple of the soldiers decided they might be able to do some looting, raping & pilaging in old Japan, so Sonny Chiba, with the help of a helicopter, shoots them before they get a chance. Eventually, after one war scene after another (the samurai armies have more primitive weapons, but there are way more of them, so I guess they're evenly matched), even Sonny Chiba and his boys end up dead. A downbeat ending for a downbeat film. A movie which manages to be both uninteresting and depressing at the same time. -DF

GAMERA 3: THE AWAKENING OF IRIS

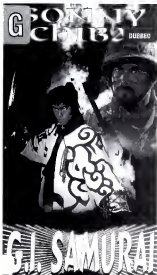
(AKA "Gamera vs. Iryu," "Gamera vs. Iri," "Gamera Tai Iriku," etc.) Do!e! 1998, Directed by Shusuke Kamekura, Written by

Kazuo Ito & Shusuke Kamekura, FX Dir.: Shinya Higuchi, monsters created by Tetsuo Haraguchi; Music: Ko Otsu, Starring Shinobu Nakayama (as Miyuki Nagayama), Ai Maeda (as Ayano Hirakawa), Yukijiro Hattori (as Tsutomu Osada), Ayako Fujitani (as Asagi Kusamagi), Senn Yamazaki (as Mito Asakura), Tami Tazuka (as Shinya Rurata), Hi Koyama (as Tatsunori Maribe), Hirofumi Fukazawa as Gamera and Akira Ohashi as Iryu. Reviewed by Damon Foster

I'm a lot more patient with these newer Gamera movies than I am with the more recent (AKA "hesel") Godzilla series, because while I love the Godzilla odds, I'm not particularly fond of the original Gamera kiddy movies (I absolutely loved the hell out of them when I was a child, but I outgrew that infantile nonsense). So this "new age" of Gamera movies is a welcome change. This, plus entrepreneur J.D. Lees hiring school-buses to take us from G-Fest to the Egyptian Theater helped—I had never seen Gamera on the big screen before. So with these factors in mind, I enjoyed the fuckout of GAMERA 3.

Gamera is pretty charismatic, and his exploits almost had me clapping out loud like the idiots in the audience who think such obnoxious applause can be heard by Gamera. As is always the case, these monster scenes are the highlight of the movie. However, this is not to say that the monster battles, and destruction scenes (the flying bodies are a neat effect though) are perfect. GAMERA 3 is a little too much like Tri-Star's crap, in that it relies on computer generated FX. Though there's a man in the Gamera suit and these epic scenes offer their share of thrills, this impersonal, highly artificial approach lacks the heart, and spirit of the original movies—where the monsters may have looked rubbery, but they looked like solid creatures, and not high-tech cartoons. Call me oldfashioned, but I'll stick to the grittier, basic approach. Though the childish scripts & characters of GAMERA VS. ZIGRA suck, Gamera himself had more personality and looked more pleasant; with those big eyes and more natural (non-morphing) movements. I also am sick and tired of all the monster battles always taking place at night. This wasn't such a hindrance in the theater, but I imagine the lack of sufficient lighting detracts visibility when seen on the TV screen.

But no matter what problems the monster scenes have, the human scenes, as always, are far worse. Sometimes I wonder why these damn films even bother adding any humans at all. It seems GAMERA 3 was designed to employ as many actresses as is possible. The chicks are cute, but for most



of the running time, the damn screen is littered with them—most are unnecessary characters. As far as I'm concerned, the only actor who was ever charismatic in a Gamera movie was Kojiro Hongo.

This somewhat better-than-average movie deals with the return of rival marauding giants Gamera and Geos. So far, so good. But then we get introduced to all these teenagers and some gross-out new monster called Iris. Iris starts off kinda' cutsey and some chick tries to adopt it as a pet. She later seems to want some sort of sexual relationship with it, despite its looking like an octopus with the head of a giraff (mind you, a very sexy octopus with the head of a giraff). The confused gal starts unbuttoning her blouse and says "I'm so hot"! This is false advertising, as she doesn't look all that hot to me. Regardless, the tentacled giraff seemed impressed enough to wrap his tentacles around her. Suddenly, I thought we were watching an intelligent, adult film, but no way! Later, it's revealed Iris is more-or-less "eating" her, but not as in oral sex (which I always thought meant, "Talking about sex"). Iris is a lot like the creature in the early 1980s remake of *THE THING*, the way it absorbs people. Anyway, I had hoped Iris would completely consume, digest & recycle the annoying bitch, as the movie has plenty of others to keep the quota satisfied. But instead, Iris grows giant and battles Gamera who rips into Iris and tears out its guts & stomach, releasing the dumb teeny-bopper, who by then

would have been completely digested....this whole sequence reminds me just a little too much of the Woodcutter releasing Little Red Riding Hood from the stomach of the Big Bad Wolf. Anyway, by this time, Gamera has defeated Iris, when he should have defeated the humans. *** - DF

AGENT AIKA- NAKED MISSION

1997, 60 Min., Director, Katsushino Naohiro, Reviewed by George Garvey

Okay, anime fans, you're gonna like this one. If you like action/comedy/sci-fi/anime like new *CUTIE HONEY*, then check out *AGENT AIKA*. Weird, cool, funny and exciting! Cool spy music during the parking lot fight. I don't think this could be turned into a live action movie, it just wouldn't work. With a story like this, anime is the way to go. Check out *AGENT AIKA*.

Agent Aika is a martial artist, jet pilot, scuba diver and a sharp dresser. With her partner Rion they do jobs ranging from underwater salvage to spy missions. In this one, a shadowy organization lead by an Industrialist wants Aika and her rival Gusto to find the Lapu. The Lapu is an energy source and weapon. But the military wants it also. The military has its chief mad scientist named Hargen looking for it too. Aiding Hargen is an army of female killers who wear tight fitting mini-skirt uniforms. Hargen's sister Nena commands these gals. In one scene, Aika and Gusto are attacked

in an underground parking lot by the mini-skirt killers. The fight is very well done, the animation is first class! Aika and Gusto win, but then they meet Nena. Cold and calculating, Nena is a typical anime creation. She's so friggin' incredible looking that it borders on ridiculous!! Nena makes anyone's real life dream woman look like a man by comparison!! She's also a jet pilot and likes to wear very little while engaging in aerial combat! Hargen likes purple hair and lipstick while wearing a white lab coat over a nazi style uniform. Operating from a war ship, Hargen plans to betray the military and rule the world. Aika, Rion and Gusto end up on Hargen's ship. Hargen has the hots for Aika and this upsets Nena. She hates Aika. Hargen has the lapu and has constructed a death ray with it. Rion is trying to avoid capture and Gusto is running around the ship shooting it out with the mini-skirt killers. Aika fools Hargen and gets a computer disc with complete information on the lapu. This information is worth 100 million bucks to Aika and Rion. In addition to her numerous skills and her trusty electrified cattle-prod, Aika has a gold bra that comes to life in times of extreme emergency (like when her jet almost crashed) and saves Aika, it also changes her appearance. Amazing! It ends in a cliff-hanger. Aika is captured, Gusto is going to be executed, Rion is running for her life. It continues on volume 2 called "Take-Off Position" which I haven't seen yet but plan to.

***1/2 -George Garvey

convention review: G-FEST 1999

Dates: July 23-25, 1999

Location: Hilton Burbank Hotel & Convention Center

Guests: Noriaki Yuasa, Shusuke Kaneko, Jerry Ito, Hiroshi Kashiwabara, Wataru Mimura, Robert Scott Field, Volker Engel, Peter Fernandez, Corrine Orr, William Stout, Forrest J. Ackerman

To casual attendees, G-Fest '99, the first Southern California convention of its type, was a smash success; a big hit. Lotsa' fun for all who attended, despite the massive distances many people traveled. Mike Simpson flew in from England and found it well worth it, and Madison Carter came

from Texas, maxing out a two-thousand dollar credit card in the process, but felt it was money well spent—though he did end the sentence with "I guess". But still, a fun time was had by all. There were several film, video and/or projection rooms where fans could see a variety of Japanese thrillers on decent sized screens. Not just the obligatory monster movies, but super-heroes, cartoons and even an occasional samurai flick. For me, the best thing was being in a nicely sized room seeing a subtitled version (who would have thought?) of *KAMEN RIDER V3 VS. DESTRON*, blown up for all to enjoy (though the room was less than half full).

One of the most interesting people I met was Bill Winckler, who released the origi-

nal Japanese *TEKKAMAN* cartoon to America back in the 1980s. This guy sure had some fascinating stories to tell. Back when *TEKKAMAN* appeared on TV, I never got a chance to watch much of it, and Bill explained that shortly after the program's release, it got pushed aside by a flood of robot cartoons like *TRANSFORMERS*, *VOLTRON* and *GOBOTS*. At about this time, Winckler, who appears to be drastically ahead of his time, had planned on releasing the then new Sentai series, *DENZIMAN* to America. As I understand it, they were going to splice in Adam West (only too happy to re-gain superhero status), to be a controller of the Denziman squad—rather like a live-action *7-Zark-7*. I didn't catch the whole story, as to why this pro-

gram never came about. Bill's girlfriend, Dezzie, said she used to watch GODZILLAS (dubbed in English, no less) in the Philippines, retitled STAR RANGERS, which they tend to pronounce "Estar Rangers".

Being that G-Fest was conveniently (for the hotel, that is) located in an isolated spot devoid of restaurants and grocery stores, we were forced to subject ourselves to The Daily Grill, an outrageously overpriced cafe within the hotel itself, which sold the best ten-dollar hamburger I ever ate. It's a conspiracy, I tell ya! They deliberately choose a barren spot lacking in fast food joints, and see to it that most of the hotel rooms lack ovens & refrigerators! What a bunch of fucking assholes!!!! There were reasonably priced (well...almost) food vendors & concession stands in the lobbies too. So needless to say, my only expense was food (I shared a hotel room with others, sleeping on the floor in a sleeping bag), and I did not buy any merchandise in the dealers' room. Predictably, the room was full of superhero and monster dolls, sold at absolutely outrageous prices. I don't really care what these greedy pricks sell their toys & model kits for, since buying kiddy crap isn't high on my list of priorities (my limited funds only allow for two hobbies: Staying fed and keeping a roof over my head).

I was pretty amazed by the impressive amount of celebrities on hand, specifically flown out to the convention. Though there were Americans on hand who wrote books or worked with Tri-Star and consider themselves celebrities, it was the Japanese guests who were the most interesting. But I realized as I sat there in the audience, sitting not far from the stage, seeing a lecture by Hiroshi Kashiwabara, that I'm no longer a really big "fan" of Godzilla movies (especially all this 'heisel' crap). "Fan" is short for fanatical, and I don't obsess over minor details & trivia of such films. I do like the movies more than the average person, and have grown up on them, but that doesn't make me a fanatic. Anyway, Mr. Kashiwabara wrote screenplays for GODZILLA VS. SPACE GODZILLA (1994) and other Japanese sci-fi films, and yet the interview bored me to tears! Kashiwabara talked about how the film directors cut scenes (i.e. a scene of Space Godzilla in space, crashing through a NASA space station; and photos of the astronauts' family floating through space) from his screenplays. I didn't find this very

interesting, & I assumed it was because my interest in new Godzilla movies, AKA the "Heisel" Godzilla films, is quite lacking. So I decided it would be good to come back



Top: Foster with Mike Simpson, showing off the most bizarre Kaiju collectible ever: A Yagoray tape alarm from Forest This is no joke!

Middle: GODZILLA VS SPACE GODZILLA screenwriter Hiroshi Kashiwabara and your editor.

Bottom: August Ragone meets Noriaki Yuasa.

to my roots, the older movies.....

I was invited back to the room of Noriaki Yuasa, the director responsible for most of the original Gamera movies of the 1960s. Me, Bob Johnson & August Ragone interviewed him for at least a couple hours. Through a translator, the courteous Mr. Yuasa told us much about his Gamera movies, though it wasn't anything I didn't already know from writing a biography of him in O.C.: The Gamera Issue from around 1995. I must confess I was dozing off at one point, until finally I got a chance to ask a couple questions about lesser known Yuasa projects. I was most disappointed that he remembered little from his days directing episodes of such outstanding programs as IRON KING and DENJIN ZABOGA. We were of the mistaken impression that he had directed four episodes of DENJIN ZABOGA, though he at first claimed he had only directed only one! August Ragone mentioned that a book said that Yuasa directed four, and Yuasa gave a Japanese equivalent of "If you say so!" Obviously, his early 1970s TV shows were so long ago that little is remembered, so I quickly asked him about ULTRAMAN 80. Unfortunately, by this time, my videocamera had run out of tape, just when the damn interview was finally getting interesting! However, I do remember Yuasa stating he was on a cycle with other directors, directing some episodes (about half) as the job was rotated. He commented on the earlier episodes having more originality, because the character Takeshi Yamato (AKA Ultraman 80 in human form) was originally a school teacher, and not a member of the program's obligatory defense force, UGM (Utility Government Members). Noriaki Yuasa was annoyed that the powers-at-be insisted on predictability and repetition (a ratings ploy, to cash-in on a guaranteed successful approach), and inevitably, the hero of the series became a member of the UGM squad. He felt the change was too abrupt, they didn't give him enough time to make a smooth transition in the plot, resulting in jarring continuity errors from one episode to the next. This, and the formula-ridden approach disillusioned Yuasa, and from then on, he only completed the series for the money.

Noriaki Yuasa is a cool, polite, down-to-earth gentleman who seemed most flattered to meet people in America who grew up on his films. He was almost con-

stantly accessible, hanging out in the lobby, the hotel, attending panels (either on stage or in the audience) and was always patient, and more than willing to talk (via translators like Satoko Yoshimaru) to all his fans, pose for pictures and answer thousands of questions from fan after fan. There were other Japanese guests available to the fans too, posing for photos, doing interviews and lectures, signing autographs, etc. These included Kaigo Okada (writer; GAMERA 3), Hiroshi Kashiwabara (screenwriter; GODZILLA VS. SPACE GODZILLA), Wataru Mimura (screenwriter; GODZILLA VS. MECHAGODZILLA '93) and Shusuke Kaneko (director; GAMERA: GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE). There were also appearances by American actors like Jerry Ito (MOTHRA) and Robert Scott Field (GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDRAH).

Of all the celebrities though, the two that I was most impressed by were voice actors Peter Fernandez and Corrine Orr. I grew up hearing them! Peter Fernandez has a distinctively raspy voice; the voice of Speed Racer, Alakazam the Great, characters in INFRAMAN (English script written by Peter Fernandez himself), and credits too numerous to list; my god! The guy can be heard in cartoons, sci-fi movies, spaghetti westerns; you name it, he's done it. The same can be said for Corrine Orr, his long-time "co-star," best known for her "award winning performance" as Trixie, but also supplied voices for Spirdal, characters in MARINEBOY, INFRAMAN, and, as is the case with Fernandez, there's too much to list. In GAMERA VS. MONSTER X, I recall quite vividly, her words, "Oh! The submarine!" Fernandez and Orr, despite their widespread work in the genres, are two of the most casual, mellow, down-to-earth, cool people you could ever meet.

I was incredibly nervous when, at the last minute, I was asked to be the moderator for their (Peter Fernandez, Corrine Orr) panel. As I understand it, they originally wanted August Ragone to be the host, but since he was burned out and declined, they asked me. Because of stage-fright and being unprepared, I recruited David McRobie (editor of the fanzine Xenorama) to be my assistant-interviewer. During the course of the panel, we took questions from the audience, and I had a few of my own: Friends had told me they heard Spanish-dubbed versions of SPEED RACER, and were convinced it was Peter's

voice in those prints too. I later caught one of these episodes on a Mexican station, and also agreed it was the distinctive voice of Fernandez. So when I basically asked him when he dubbed SPEED RACER in Spanish, he gave me a blank stare and assured me he doesn't speak Spanish! Well, now we all know, Mexico has a voice-dubber who's a Peter Fernandez sound-alike! Pedro Fernandez? Corrine Orr had some interesting stories to tell too. One of her favorite dubbings was in Etsuko Shiomi's

SISTER STREETFIGHTER (Toei; 1975), because she got to do much more yelling & battle cries than actual words!

Schoolbuses drove the convention goers from the hotel to the Egyptian Theater, for the official screening of GAMERA 3 (see my review elsewhere). A huge line of conventioners (how the hell did they fit all them people into just two measly buses?) went down the block, but I didn't have to wait because of my 'performance' in the theater's lobby near the concession stand. That was me in the plush Gamera costume (greeting attendees, posing for pictures and acting silly) created by Dennis Lancaster (AKA "Mr. Dinosaur") of "Dangerous Dino's" fame. It was fun entertaining the kiddies again (back in the 1980s, I did stunts as Big Bird, Mickey Mouse, Alf, and a California Raisin during a brief period with Spirit Costume & Party Supply before they became a mega-successful, seasonal business), even though the thick, hot, heavy costume had me sweating like O.J. Simpson at a battered women's support group. I was mildly disappointed later to see the photos of me in some geek/hobby magazine from Japan, since I wasn't credited. Oh well, I survived.

So there you have it, the positive aspects of G-Fest. But perfection is a myth, so everything has its downside. The real problem for G-Fest was disorganization behind the scenes. Tempers flared, tension was in the air and egos clashed. I myself had no problem with anybody I met, but the amount of in-fighting I heard (from both sides; thanks to my neutral, don't-take-anybody-seriously approach) really got annoying. It was frustrating when they would move our panel-discussions at the last minute, to smaller rooms which were less accommodating. I was most annoyed when our superhero panel got relegated to a room which lacked microphones! Obviously, the "powers at be" don't see the likes of Ultraman and Kamen Rider to be important genres. I got quite hoarse trying to yell, to be heard (competing with a loud stereo-video system, and some sort of concert going on in the room next to us); and I wanted to smack the people in the back rows who kept heckling me with screams of "Louder!" and "Speak up!" August Ragone & Bob Johnson both supplied rare TV shows for the closed-circuit TV channel, but this turned out to be a chaotic mess; the chief executive officer of G-Fest didn't clear this with the hotel in



Top: Bob Johnson's brief stint as Ultraman Jack.
Back: Damon F. Garrett.

advance, resulting in a long, frustrating headache—and not to mention lotsa' running around from building to building. As I understand it, the guy (David Nguyen, I think his name is) in charge of this is really more of a toy dealer. People who still deal with kiddy crap shouldn't be given so much responsibility.

I regret never having been able to talk much with founder J.D. Lees (perhaps that's why G-Fan captioned my name to a photo of somebody else), the man who made this all possible. I know a lot of people who dislike him, but I always try to judge people when I meet them personally, and not base my views on the rumors of others. He was always off & running. Everyone demanded his time and attention, as he dealt with business, complaints, last minute schedule changes, petty bickering between his staff members, stuffing envelopes, etc. The guy had to have been stressed out with everybody breathing down his neck, but he certainly seemed calm the whole time. In that position, I doubt I could have been remained calm, and by the second day, would have been delivering round-house kicks to the faces to anybody who whined.

Since the "G" in G-Fest and the magazine *G-Fan* doesn't officially stand for "Godzilla" (due to copyright reasons), I was wondering what it represents. My first speculation was "giant," or "gigantic!" Then later, when convention goers arrived in their glasses, T-shirts, bewilderingly technical discussions on the merits of every aspect of the newest Ultraman movie, "Gilligan" (1960s Bob Denver look) haircuts and obesity, the "G" became all too clear; it stands for "GEEK FEST"! But I was told, by several sources, to keep all my presentations & video clips clean for safe family entertainment, as the kiddies were there in force. So I now have a new idea as to what the G stands for. It means, "G-Rated!" This never became so obvious as it was at the joke they called a "costume contest," held on Saturday night. This guy named Omar (Amar? Something like that) had this excellent Godzilla costume (and an amateur video of him as Godzilla battling Ghidrah to go with it) made of foam rubber, and I was equally impressed by a man who came as the Controller of Planet X. But the winner was some chick who put her baby in a "Guiron" costume; pajamas dyed green and a cardboard blade sticking out of the kid's head. Since the infant crawled on all



Classic voice over stars Peter Fernandez and Larriue On.

fours, this child did resemble a crawling Guiron from a distance. I admit it was a clever concept, but I thought this was a Costume Contest, and not a Most Adorable Baby Contest.

Not a perfect convention, but it was definitely the best one I've ever been to. For once there was a con with a topic I could relate to. I was in my element. It's such a relief to be at a con where the emphasis wasn't on overrated stuff like DR, WHO, STAR TREK, STAR WARS, etc. G-Fest spoiled me, I can't look back. I'll never go to an-

other Wondercon, Baycon, or Timecon. No more comicbook conventions, as it just wouldn't be the same. People interested in attending the upcoming G-Fest 2000 may find out more by going to their website <www.g-fan.com>, or by contacting Neptune Media Inc. (614-784-0123), at P.O. Box 3647, Columbus, OH 43210. G-Fest 2000 will be held at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel (1-800-252-7466), on July 14, 15 & 16. The hotel is at: 7000 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, CA 90028.-DF



Though blurry beyond recognition, you'll just have to take my word for it, it's August Ragone, Nonski Yassa, Bob Johnson and Darman Foster.

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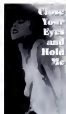
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